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JEWISH VALUES IN PHILIP ROTH'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Since the very beginning of his writing career, Philip Roth has been charged by American Jewish leaders and rabbis and even some literary critics of anti-Semitism and self-hatred. Those accusations were motivated by the way Roth depicts American Jewish life in his fictional works which, in the view of his accusers, denigrates the Jewish people and their traditions and institutions.

This dissertation aims to analyze the real intention of Roth's approach to Jewishness in his fictional works. In order to carry out this study, three among Roth's books were chosen: **Goodbye, Columbus** (1959), **Portnoy's Complaint** (1969), and **The Ghost Writer** (1979). The protagonists in these books are observed in their commitment/detachment from Judaism and from all those religious values and traditions received from their parents and forbears.

The conclusion is that, although a superficial reading of Roth's works may induce one to agree with the accusations of the Jewish leaders and rabbis, Roth's objective when approaching Jewishness is a far cry from that. In what concerns their religious life, Roth's protagonists do keep a certain detachment from Judaism because they are involved in the search for a religiousness which transcends the limits of any organized religion.

RESUMO

Desde o começo de sua carreira como escritor, Philip Roth tem sido acusado por líderes judeus americanos, rabinos e até mesmo por alguns críticos literários de anti-semitismo e ódio pela sua condição de judeu. Essas acusações foram motivadas pela maneira como Roth retrata a vida judaica americana em seus trabalhos de ficção, a qual, na visão de seus acusadores, denigre o povo judeu, suas tradições e instituições.

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo analisar a verdadeira intenção da abordagem que Roth dá ao Judaismo em sua ficção. Para proceder com este estudo, três dos livros de Roth foram escolhidos: **Goodbye, Columbus** (1959), **Portnoy's Complaint** (1969) e **The Ghost Writer** (1979). Os protagonistas desses três livros são observados em seu compromisso/descompromisso com o Judaismo e com todos os valores religiosos e tradições recebidas dos seus pais e antepassados.

A conclusão é que, embora uma leitura superficial dos livros de Roth possa levar o leitor a concordar com as acusações dos líderes judeus e dos rabinos, o objetivo de Roth ao abordar o Judaísmo está longe disto. No que se refere a sua vida religiosa, os protagonistas de Roth realmente mantêm um certo distanciamento do Judaísmo porque eles estão empenhados na busca de uma religiosidade que transcende os limites de qualquer religião enquanto organização.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

American literature is usually divided into categories which correspond to the different groups which constitute American society. Thus, there is Southern literature, Black literature, Feminist literature and Chicano literature, among others. Likewise, it is taken for granted that the writers of each one of these categories, instead of simply portraying the lives of the groups to which they belong, also defend in their works the principles and values borne by these groups. So, if one reads any of Toni Morrison's novels, he is certainly going to find elements which support the American black people's cause. In a novel written by a feminist writer like Marge Piercy, one can find elements of the women's movement. In the same way, when reading novels by Jewish writers what one naturally expects is, if not a steadfast defense of the Jewish traditions and values, at least an identification or simpathy with them. Of course, this expectation is justified by the fact that Jewish writers have a common religious background which characterizes them as members of the same cultural and social and religious group.

However, a first reading of some Jewish writing might thwart this expectation. Getting in contact with American Jewish fiction, one will soon find out that those writers cannot be taken as spokesmen for a minority that tries to assure its place in the country's social fabric. Furthermore, as Mark Shechner points out, they "seem to have little in common as writers or as

people that would support inferences about a shared heritage or tradition (...)."[1] It is still Shechner who states that the only thing to justify their common label is the fact that they all "happen to be Jews or, to put it more prudently, of Jewish descent (...)."[2]

It is precisely dealing with this common element that label them together in the category of Jewish writers that Philip Roth has faced severe attacks, especially from the American Jewish establishment. His depiction of Jewish characters has provoked the anger of some Jews who charged him of anti-Semitism and self-hatred. Not only religious people but also rabbis have written to newspapers and to the Anti-Defamation League reinforcing those accusations.

Talking about this subject Baumgarten and Gottfried say that, since the beginning of his career, Roth has been praised by critics for his literay style and at the same time, "he was condemned by Jewish community leaders as an anti-Semite who protrayed Jews as 'depraved and lecherous.' His work, they asserted, could only lead readers to conclude 'that this country - nay that the world - would be a much better and happier place without Jews."[3] However, it is not the entirety of literary critics who show indifference towards this aspect of Roth's fiction. Some also share the attitude of the American Jewish leaders, as Roth himself asserts in an interview to George Plimpton: "Some critics also said that my work furnished 'fuel' for anti-Semitism."[4]

Peter Shaw is certainly one of those critics who partially

shares the rabbis' charges against Roth. Analyzing **Portnoy's Complaint** in the light of "Writing About Jews," a 1963 article in which Roth defends himself against the accusations thrown at him, Shaw winds up asserting that "Roth cannot rest content with badmouthing the Jews, but must insist that he be recognized as a good Jewish boy when he does it."[5]

Taking as examples "Defender of the Faith" and **Portnoy's Complaint**, Shaw states that the message they carry out is about the necessity to transcend being Jewish rather than just to sweep away anti-Semitism. But, he concludes saying that "if only you try hard enough, Roth's books tell us, it can be done. This is a message that will not do the Jews any more damage than other specious advice they have received from time to time, so that one has to agree with Roth that his books are not harmful as charged. But if he has not been bad for the Jews, he has decidedly been bad to them - and at the expense of his art. For **Portnoy's Complaint**, in descending to caricature to get its effects, fails at the very point of imagination which raises a novel above a tract. Roth has been a positive enemy to his own works, while for the Jews he has been a friend of the proverbial sort that makes enemies unnecessary."[6]

Another critic who also shares the Jewish leaders' interpretation of Roth's works is Mordecai H. Levine. It is again in **Portnoy's Complaint** that this critic is going to find the most evident indications of Roth's anti-Semitism. In his view, "**Portnoy's Complaint** expresses so many negative feeling about Judaism that one cannot escape the conviction that these views reflect Roth's own antagonism to his faith."[7]

For Levine, Roth despises not only Judaism but other religions as well. **Portnoy's Complaint** reveals, then, that "not only is Judaism considered by Roth to be a mass of superstitious beliefs, but he adds that Jewish parents teach their children to be intolerant of other religions. Portnoy's father tells him that the Christian religion is 'a Mishegass of mixed up crap and disgusting nonsense.' In another tirade which seems to reflect Roth's own anti-religious views, Portnoy attacks Christians who 'swallow all that hideous Catholic bullshit'."[8]

After asserting that "by making Portnoy a slum sex maniac, Roth only confirms the stereotyped lies that many anti-semites of the Streicher type have told concerning the Jews whose greatest desire is to rape Gentile girls,"[9] Levine laments Roth has used his ability and talent to denigrate Jewish institutions and ends up his article expressing his hopes that "this work will be a form of catharsis and that hereafter he will be able to see more stars and less mud in the world."[10]

Irving Howe is not satisfied with Roth's dealing of Jewish theme, either. His dissatisfaction is caused not by thinking that Roth expresses anti-Semitic ideas in his fiction, but rather because he thinks Roth is very superficial when dealing with his own cultural background. In his 1959 article "The Suburbs of Babylon," Howe points out that the main theme in "Goodbye, Columbus" is "the transformation from proletarian immigrant poverty to middle class suburban comfort"[11] which many American Jews have experienced. According to him, this theme has been seldom worked with success, "mainly because American Jewish

writers have been caught up in a crippling problem of involvement. The subject proves to be both terribly close – finally, it's about one's mama and papa – and frustratingly transient – it has all occurred within a few decades and now it's almost over, the conflicts of value and generation resolved badly, the memories curdled, the pain dulled."[12] After proceeding an analysis of **Goodbye, Columbus** in which he shows the shallowness and superficiality in Roth's approach to the novella's theme, Howe says that a possible reason for this is the fact that "in his stories [Roth] cannot find sufficiently energetic and supple forces to resist the spiritual corrosion of Jewish middle-class life."[13] This resistance, Howe states, Roth has personally discovered but it has not found its way into his fiction for the possible reason that Roth "while emotionally involved with his subject, is one of the first American Jewish writers who finds, so far as I can judge, almost no sustenance in the Jewish tradition. Writers like Henry Roth, Daniel Fuchs, Delmore Schwartz and Bernard Malamud have also dealt harshly with the life of middle-class Jews, but to one or another extent the terms of their attack have been drawn from memories of Jewish childhood and family life; from the values of the Jewish traditions Mr. Roth, however, finds little here to sustain him (...)."[14]

In his 1972 article "Philip Roth Reconsidered," Howe still keeps the same opinion on Roth's approach to Jewishness. He says that "despite his concentration on Jewish settings and his acerbity of tone, [Roth] is one of the first American-Jewish writers who finds that it yields him no sustenance, no norms or

values from which to launch his attacks on middle-class complacence."[15] In the light of this conviction, he proceeds, then, an analysis of Roth's books so far published: **Goodbye, Columbus, Letting Go, When She Was Good,** and **Portnoy's Complaint**. It is precisely when analyzing this last novel that Howe becomes extremely severe with Roth's approach to Jewishness.

First, echoeing Levine's words, he says that **Portnoy's Complaint** demonstrates how much Roth despises religion. Concentrating specifically on Judaism, he asserts that "Portnoy's (...) wish to sever his sexuality from his moral sensibilities (...) helps explain, I think, what Roth's true feelings about, or relation to, Jewishness are. **Portnoy's Complaint** is not, as enraged critics have charged, an anti-Semitic book, though it contains plenty of contempt for Jewish life. Nor does Roth write out of traditional Jewish self-hatred, for the true agent of such self-hatred is always indissolubly linked with Jewish past and present, quite as closely as those who find in Jewishness moral or transcendent sanctions. What the book speaks for is a yearning to undo the fate of birth; there is no wish to do the Jews any harm (a little nastiness is something else), nor any desire to engage with them as a fevered antagonist; Portnoy is simply crying out to be left alone, to be released from the claims of distinctiveness and the burdens of the past, so that, out of his own nothingness, he may create himself as a 'human being.' Who, born a Jew in the 20th century, has been so lofty in spirit never to have shared this fantasy? But who, born a Jew in the 20th century, has been so foolish in mind as to dally with it for more

than a moment?"[16]

Secondly, Howe states that "Portnoy's Complaint has become a cultural document of some importance"[17] to both younger Jews and Gentiles as well. However, the importance he points out cannot be considered exactly positive for the Jews and Judaism as an institution. He says that "younger Jews, weary or bored with all the talk about their heritage, have taken the book as a signal for 'letting go' of both their past and perhaps themselves, a guide to swinging in good conscience or better yet, without troubling about conscience. For some Gentile readers the book seems to have played an even more important role. After the Second World War, as a consequence of certain unpleasantness that occured during the war, a wave of philo-Semitism swept through our culture. This wave lasted for all of two decades, in the course of which books by Jewish writers were often praised (in truth, overpraised) and a fuss made about Jewish intellectuals, critics, etc. Some literary people found this hard to bear, but they did. Once Portnoy's Complaint arrived, however, they could almost be heard breathing a sigh of relief, for it signaled an end to philo-Semitism in American culture, one no longer had to listen to all that talk about Jewish morality, Jewish endurance, Jewish wisdom, Jewish families. Here was Philip Roth himself, a writer who even seemed to know Yiddish, confirming what had always been suspected about those immigrant Jews but had recently not been tactful to say."[18]

Together with these foregone critics, of course, there are also those who identify neither anti-Semitism nor self-hatred in Roth's approach to Jewishness. For instance, Gershon Shaked says

that "Roth escreve a respeito da terceira geração de judeus americanos, não mais os que se criaram com pais imigrantes, mas aqueles cujos pais já nasceram nos Estados Unidos. Sua atitude para com a vida e as instituições judaicas é isenta de sentimentalismo. Não encontrando nenhum conteúdo real nestas estruturas que lhes parecem desprovidas de sentido, eles não toleram a vida social e familiar judaica. É a geração geralmente composta de rebeldes, jovens que partem para enfrentar o mundo e contudo não têm as forças de arcar com a carga sozinhos."[19]

Theodore Solotaroff also identifies a certain impartiality in Roth's dealing with Jewishness. Analyzing Goodbye, Columbus, he asserts that "Roth appears to have managed [to be in touch with both the American-Jewish scene and with himself] by making the energy and color of his stories flow in from direct connections to his own wit and feelings and observations, and by an almost aggressive frankness about Jewish experience. In any case, he deals with his situations and characters in the rare, right way - without piety or apology or vindictiveness, and by combining a first-rate eye for surfaces with a sense of depth."[20] And he still adds further ahead: "Whether angered or touched or amused by his Grossbarts and Tzureffs and Patimkins, Roth is so obviously attached to Jewish life that the charge of his being anti-semitic or a 'self-hater' is the more absurd. The directness of his attack against arrogance, smugness, finagling and acquisitiveness should not obscure the perfectly obvious fact that he does so flying a traditional Jewish banner of sentiment and humaneness and personal responsibility - all of which makes

the accusation have some further melancholy implications."[21]

Ironically, it is the rabbi and literary critic Dan Isaac who makes the most serious defense of Roth against those charges concerning his view of Judaism. In his appropriately entitled article "In Defense of Philip Roth," Isaac proposes "to demonstrate that when Roth is properly undestood he is not only a good writer but that he can also be in fact 'good for the Jews'."[22] Asserting that "Philip Roth treats Jews as **people**, and people - ancient and modern - are corruptable,"[23] Isaac concludes his analysis of Roth's first book saying that "'Goodbye, Columbus' continually implies what 'Eli, the Fanatic' boldly states: American Judaism has become the willing servant of an immoral society, corrupted by the very force it should oppose."[24]

In Isaac's view, "none of the many rabbinical attacks on Roth faced Roth's challenge in a responsible way. Their immediate reaction was a bad mannered defensiveness. (...) Unwilling to admit that Philip Roth's writing was either entertaining literature or a significant indictment of American-Jewish values, these rabbis retreated to the position of public relations men interested only in preserving a popular image of the modern Jew."[25]

Isaac closes off his article sending back to Jewish leaders their attacks against Philip Roth: He says: "At every turn the published rabbinical responses to Philip Roth misfire and fail to face the real issue: To what extent can a civilization compromise its values in order to survive, and still retain its distinct and original integrity? Roth's fiction suggests that in some quarters the struggle is already over. Judaism has gone through the quiet

metamorphosis demanded by American society and emerged as a co-operative, acquisitive member of the new frontier. That American rabbis resent this indictment is understandable; but to attack the critic rather than to face the criticism is unforgiveable."[26]

All this fuss about Roth's religious view adds up to the importance of Jewishness in his fictional works. However, it seems to me that this issue is still far from being exausted. I could observe that all of these critics above draw their conclusions on an analysis which usually takes into consideration only the set of moral values that guides Roth's Jewish characters' life. None of them concentrate specifically on the religiousness of those characters and the way they relate to their religion. By making a careful analysis of this aspect of Roth's fiction, I will demonstrate that his real intention is, through the fictionalization of an actual experience of his, to universalize the theme of religious influence on man's life rather than to denigrate his own people and his religion. In this sense, the ultimate message he means to convey is that the real religiousness transcends the limits of the organized religions.

In order to undertake my analysis, I will take three of Roth's books: **Goodbye, Columbus** (1959), **Portnoy's Complaint** (1969) and **The Ghost Writer** (1979). Separated by a ten-year time span, these three works will give us a clear idea of the development of the theme of religion in a large period of Roth's writing career, besides the fact that they mark three significant moments of this career. Being his first book to be published, **Goodbye, Columbus** raised the anger of many members of the

American Jewish establishment against Roth. Although well-meaning in his depiction of Jewish life, with this book Roth starts being labelled as an anti-Semitic and self-hating Jewish writer. **Portnoy's Complaint**, besides being Roth's best known work, is undoubtedly the novel in which he approaches the theme of religion more directly. With **The Ghost Writer**, Roth starts, in his fictional works, reacting against those accusations lavished upon him.

Before starting the analysis of these three novels, I will present some basic religious and social values of Judaism. But, as we know, like all great religions, Judaism is divided into several segments as a consequence of disagreements in some theological issues among Jews. In spite of this, it is possible to identify a set of values which is common to all the different Jewish movements. Some of these values are what I intend to define in the first chapter, putting them in four different groups:

1. God-man relationship in the Jews' view
2. Observance of rituals and old customs
3. Marriage and family unity
4. The meaning of suffering

Besides giving a theoretical support to the analysis of Roth's works, the presentation of these Jewish values will provide elements for a better understanding of the religious background of Roth's characters.

As it is my intention to define those foregoing values keeping as close as possible to their most accepted definition among the Jewish people, I will use three different books which

deal with Judaism. They are:

a) Isidore Epstein's **Judaismo**, which deals essentially with Judaism as a religious way of life. It describes the origin and growth of Judaism as well as its beliefs, religious and ethical doctrines, hopes, aspirations, and thoughts. When interpreting events and traditions of the Jews, Epstein adopts a traditional point of view, putting aside the different interpretations for them provided by modern currents of thought inside Judaism.

b) Arthur Hertzberg's **Judaismo**, which was written based on the assumption that there is an essential unity common to all different Jewish movements. Hertzberg tries to prove that by presenting the concepts of the basic Jewish values.

c) David J. Goldberg and John D. Rayner's **Os Judeus e o Judaismo**. Besides providing a wide-ranging narrative of the history of the Jewish people, this book also concentrates on their culture, bringing three chapters dedicated to the literature of Judaism, and the theory of Judaism and its practice.

After this first chapter on Jewish values, the next ones will deal with the books I have chosen to work on. Their presentation will follow their chronological sequence of publication. Analyzing them, I will observe their protagonists' characteristcs, behavior and viewpoints in relation to Judaism. In the Conclusion Chapter, I will demonstrate how Roth's treatment of Judaism leads to a universalization of the theme of religion in his fiction.

NOTES

[1] Shechner, Mark. "Jewish Writers." In Havard Guide to **Contemporary American Writing**, ed. by Daniel Hoffman (Massachusetts: Havard University Press, 1979), pp. 191

[2] Shechner p. 191

[3] Baumgarten, Murray and Gottfried, Barbara. **Understanding Philip Roth**. (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 4

[4] Roth, Philip. **Reading Myself and Other**. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 20

[5] Shaw, Peter. "Portnoy & His Creator." (**Commentary**, 47, 1969), pp. 79

[6] Shaw. "Portnoy & His Creator," p. 79

[7] Levine, Mordecai H. "Philip Roth and American Judaism." (CLA Journal, 14, 1970), p. 169

[8] Levine, p. 169

[9] Levine, p. 169

[10] Levine, p. 170

[11] Howe, Irving. "The Suburbs of Babylon." (**New Republic**, 15, 1959), p. 17

[12] Howe. "The Suburbs of Babylon," p. 17

[13] Howe. "The Suburbs of Babylon," p. 18

[14] Howe. "The Suburbs of Babylon," p. 18

[15] Howe, Irving. "Philip Roth Reconsidered." In **Critical Essays on Philip Roth**, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 241-2

[16] Howe. "Philip Roth Reconsidered," p. 242

[17] Howe. "Philip Roth Reconsidered," p. 243

[18] Howe. "Philip Roth Reconsidered," p. 243

[19] Shaked, Gershon. **Sombras de Identidade**. (Associação Universitária de Cultura Judaica, 1988), p. 124

[20] Solotaroff, Theodore. "Philip Roth and the Jewish Moralists." **Chicago Review**, 13 (1959), p. 18

[21] Solotaroff, p. 19

[22] Isaac, Dan. "In Defense of Philip Roth." In **Critical Essays on Philip Roth**, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 183

[23] Isaac, p. 185

[24] Isaac, p. 191

[25] Isaac, p. 191

[26] Isaac, p. 192

FIRST CHAPTER

SOME JEWISH VALUES

1. GOD-MAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE JEWS' VIEW

The history of the relationship between God and the Jews started with their first patriarch Abraham. According to Genesis, Abraham left his father's family and his city in obedience to God's command and went to the Land of Canaan. There, God established a covenant with him through which Abraham was promised to become the founder of a great nation and that the possession of the land of Canaan would be given to him and his progeny.

This covenant was renewed and sealed some years later, during the Exodus, in Mount Sinai, when Moses received the Torah from God and presented it to the Jews. This covenant made them the chosen people of God. But this divine choice involves a peculiar condition. It does not bring privileges and superiority to the Jews. They were not chosen to dominate over other nations and possess great length of lands. Instead, as Epstein says, they were chosen to perform a universal service to both God and the whole mankind[1].

The kind of service the Jews have to perform to God is well expressed in the words of Goldberg:

> (...) [O povo judeu] deve ser servo e testemunha de

> Deus, proclamando a Sua sabedoria, atestando a Sua unidade, exemplificando a Sua lei moral e assim pavimentando o caminho para o estabelecimento do Seu reino (...)[2].

The nature of this service is what has made the Jews a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6)[3].

To mankind, the Jews' service consists mainly in being an example of how to live in justice and righteousness. As Goldberg and Rayner put it, with their behavior the Jews should influence mankind so that God's project of redemption of the world can advance (JJ, p. 320). As we shall see, this concept that the Jews perform a service to mankind is so relevant to Judaism that it has been used to explain the history of persecution and suffering they have come through.

God's relationship with the Jews reveals nothing about his essence, but much about his attributes. Epstein points out (J, p. 28) that the most complete revelation on this are the "Thirteen Attributes" which are in Exodus 34:6-7:

> The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Still according to Epstein, these attributes are divided into two groups, namely, justice and righteouness. This latter is revealed through God's forgiveness to the sinners whereas Divine Justice

is based on the principle of retribution. In accordance with the precept of Divine Justice man is rewarded for his obedience and punished for his rebellion against God's commandments. This is applied to all men, but, in the particular case of the Jews, as Goldberg and Rayner suggest, Divine Justice is especially severe. For being the chosen people, the Jews have more obligations in the presence of God than other peoples and, thus, they are subject to a more severe judgment (JJ, p.320). The mission they received from God is inherent to them all and no Jewish-born man can evade it (JJ, p. 318).

This precept of Divine Justice, however, is not only present in God-man relationship. It also rules man's doings and his relationships with his fellowmen. One's behavior towards another is judged by God and fairly rewarded or punished. Epstein states that "não há ação humana que possa passar impune" (J, p. 133). Of course, this means that God observes and judges each single action man does during his whole life.

Two points can be considered from this interference from God with man's affairs. First, based on the way Divine Justice works, one might think that revenge is one of God's attributes. This would be based on the fact that God does not accept man's disagreement or refusal of the divine commands. But, it is not so. Epstein says that when God punishes a sinner he does not do it out of anger, but rather out of love. What he really means is to save the sinner from his own sins and misery and, eventually, give him salvation and happiness (J, p. 133). Thus, we can say that punishment means a call from God for man to return to the way of justice and righteousness.

The second point we can raise from this definition of Divine Justice concerns man's free will. To which extent is man really free to do whatever he wants if God is constantly judging and retributing all of man's actions? Judaism does not offer a definite answer to this question. In fact, it could not do it since there is no official Jewish theology. Goldberg and Rayner say that Jewish belief has to be extrapolated from all its writings which have been produced throughout the centuries (JJ, p. 265/6). This, consequently, leaves room for the acceptance of contradictory viewpoints on controversial subjects. Man's free will is one of these subjects. So, Judaism states that everything happening in the world was previously established. In this way, man would be just following the steps of a pre-established plan which he cannot alter at all. As we can conclude, this concept sees man as totally dependant on God. But, at the same time, Judaism also supports the concept of man's free will which means that man, to some extent, is the master of his own destiny. This contradiction is well condensed in Hertzberg's statement: "Foi tudo previsto, mas apesar disto, o homem tem vontade própria."[4]

Goldberg and Rayner point out the root of this problem when they say:

> Filosoficamente, é difícil de encaixar [o livre arbítrio] em qualquer teoria da causalidade; teologicamente, parece depreciar a onipotência e a presciência de Deus (JJ, p. 295).

Man's free will would depreciate God's omnipotence and prescience in the sense that it implies man can do whatever he wants

regardless of God's consent and it also implies that God cannot foresee what man will do in the future. And it is still Goldberg and Rayner who try to find a conciliatory approach:

> Então, existe condução divina tanto na vida dos indivíduos quanto na história da humanidade. Mas conduzir não é governar. O homem permanece livre para atender, ignorar ou negar a condução: para escolher o bem ou o mal, a bênção ou a praga, a vida ou a morte. (Deuteronômio 30: 15,19). Logo, o que acontece no mundo de Deus depende significativamente, se não em última análise, do homem (JJ, p. 291).

We can conclude, then, that God's interference with man's life is a belief above any doubt in Judaism. The intensity of this interference is what remains to be clarified.

This belief forwards us to another broader and also controversial assumption in Judaism: God's presence in history. In the Jews' view history is a manifestation of the divine will on earth for, when interfering with each individual's affairs, God will be inevitably interfering with history. Needless to say that those who defend this viewpoint do not accept man has free will. This assumption of history was especially developed by the prophets. Epstein says that "a história não era para [os profetas] uma mera sucessão de acontecimentos sem objetivo e propósito" (J, p. 68). According to their view, daily events are small parts of a whole process whose final objective is the establishment of a kingdom of justice and peace on earth.

This view gives history a tremendous importance among the Jews. They search in the events of their national history for

God's manifestations. They have to be meditated over in order to get the right interpretation of the divine will. This view, however, should not be restricted only to the history of the Jewish people. Epstein emphasizes that in the Jews' view this concept of history is also applied to the history of all nations and peoples (J, p. 58).

In the same way, the events of an individual's life should be carefully pondered. Regardless of its importance, each single event has to be taken as a manifestation of the divine will. As the Talmud puts it "nenhum homem machuca seu dedo aqui em baixo a menos que tal tenha sido decretado para ele de cima" (qtd in JJ, p. 285). In a broader sense, these events are meant to reveal what God has designed to be the individual's specific mission in the process of redemption of the world.

For being an agent of this process, man is depicted in the Talmud as God's shuttaf (partner) (J, p. 135). Basically, what man is supposed to do is obey God's commandments. In the case of the gentiles, they only have to observe the "law of Noah" which was revealed after the Deluge. Goldberg and Rayner say that this law is extended to all men because it was given to the first generation, what makes it universal (JJ, p. 310). The Jews, however, besides the law of Noah, also have to observe the Ten Commandments together with all the teachings and rituals and procedures present in the Torah. Our next step is to take a look at some of these observances.

2. OBSERVANCE OF RITUALS AND OLD CUSTOMS

Due to their condition of chosen people of God, the Jews are supposed to observe a set of rituals and customs every day of their life. These range from the dietary laws that discipline the Jews' eating to their role in the social system in which they live. Here, we are going to talk about some of these rituals and customs, focusing on their traditional meaning to the Jewry.

Perhaps the most known Jewish observance among the gentiles are the dietary laws. These start with the choice of the animal to be eaten and go through the way it should be killed, its preparation and even the intention of the believer when eating it.

Although, as we have seen above, the origin of the dietary laws can be found in the Bible, there have been some attempts to explain their meaning. Hertzberg points out two reasons for them which have been produced by the traditional Jewish writing (JUD, p. 81). The first is that these laws aim to control man's animal appetites. It would be, then, an attempt to control man's savage nature when satisfying his body's necessities and, at the same time, to uplift his spirituality. Epstein agrees with this explanation. After describing the dietary laws, he ends up saying: "Todas estas prescrições se destinam a conferir ao ato animal de comer um certo elemento de espiritualidade" (J, p. 158). The second reason is that they work as a reminder to the Jews that they belong to a "kingdom of priests" and, in this way, they help to keep constantly in the Jews' mind their responsibilities to God and to the other men. In a way, they would force the Jews to stop every day, at least at mealtimes,

and think about their divine mission. This second reason seems to be the most widely accepted. Hertzberg says that when the dietary laws were abolished by the Jewish Contemporary Reform, the leaders of this movement were aware of the necessity of creating other methods to make the Jews conscious of their mission every day (JJ, p. 81).

As it was said above, the observance of the dietary laws is perhaps the most known Jewish tradition. But together with it, we can also include the circumcision. Beyond doubt, this is the oldest Jewish ritual. The circumcision was first perfomed by Abraham to seal the covenant between God and him (Genesis 17). In the subsequent generations, it was kept as a tradition to remind the Jews of their covenant with God and of their mission as a sacerdotal people.

To respect the Sabbath is another Jewish observance. This is considered a resting and sacred day. Goldberg and Rayner say that it expresses the idea that every man needs leisure, no matter the activity he does (JJ, p. 378). As the dietary laws and the circumcision, the origin of this tradition is also rooted in the Bible. It is based on Genesis 2:3 where we read: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."

A series of restrictions are imposed on the Jews on this day and these can only be broken if someone's life is in danger. According to Goldberg and Rayner the purpose of these restrictions is to sanctify life and protect the holiness of the Sabbath (JJ, p. 379).

For the pious Jews, to observe the Sabbath means more than

taking advantage of a right. It is also a demonstration of faith. Judah Halevi suggests that those who respect the Sabbath for being the resting day of the Creation, consequently, believe in the Creation and in its Creator (qtd in JUD, p. 94). In agreement with this view, Goldberg and Rayner define the respect to the Sabbath as "uma contemplação da natureza e do seu divino Criador, (...) um exercício devocional e uma experiência espiritual" (JJ, p. 379).

Besides these main observances and customs, there is a set of others which have to be observed daily, weekly or annually, in accordance with the prescription. Some of these are: to pray three times a day, if possible in a synagogue; to thank God for any pleasure one feels; to recite some specific passages from the Bible every day; to wear clothes with fringes; to wear the tefilim during the morning prayers; to celebrate annual festivals such as the Pessach, the Shavout, the Rosh Rashanah, the Iom Kipur, the Sucot, etc.

As Goldberg and Rayner suggest the main objective of most of the Jewish observances is to keep visibly in the Jews' mind some events of their own history and religious responsibilities as well (JJ, p. 362). But, on the other hand, they also have a moral dimension. Epstein says that their constant application may change man by providing him with moral stability and, through man the whole society can be changed (J, p. 23). As we can see, this view gives a social meaning to the Jewish observances and customs. Even the sacrifices which were offered in biblical times had a social aspect. Epstein says about them:

> Não são as necessidades de Deus que os sacrifícios vão satisfazer, mas as necessidades do homem. Não são concebidos como dádivas a uma divindade ofendida para apaziguar a sua ira ou em reparação de mal feito contra o semelhante. O seu objetivo é essencialmente a santidade do homem, com tudo o que esta implica de regeneração e perfeição religiosa e moral. São concebidos em todos os seus pormenores para criar na mente do devoto um sentimento do terrível existente numa ofensa religiosa, no sentido em que esta ocasiona um afastamento quer entre o homem e Deus, quer entre homem e homem (J, p. 24/5).

As we can conclude, the sacrifices also have an ultimate social meaning, although, as Epstein relates, they were not originally offered for social transgressions (J, p. 24).

3. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY UNITY

Marriage is a very respected and valued institution in Judaism. In fact, to marry is an obligation to all adult Jews (JJ, p. 412). According to Hertzberg this view is based on Genesis 1:28 which says: "Be fruitful, and multiply." But only by marrying one does not fulfill this commandment. Goldberg and Rayner add that this commandment is only fulfilled completely when man has at least a couple of children. This would correspond to God's first creation of a man and a woman (JJ, p. 412/3). As Hertzberg points out, this commandment is seen as a necessity due to what God says in Genesis 17:7 where we read: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Thus, since God has

promised to establish his covenant not only with man but with his progeny as well, it is man's obligation to have children with whom this covenant will be carried out.

Besides procreation, Goldberg and Rayner still point out two other functions of marriage in the Jewish view. The first is companionship. By marrying, man has someone to make him company during all the days of his life, since "it is not good that [...] man should be alone" (Genesis 1:18). Certainly we can add to this function the Talmudic teaching that marriage makes possible to lead a life in chastity and purity which is difficult to do when one is single (qtd in J, p. 164).

The other function of marriage which Goldberg and Rayner present is the establishment of family as the basic social unity and of home as a sanctuary. It is in this sense, then, that the parents have the obligation to educate their children in accordance with the Jewish traditions and principles.

Although in mixed marriages the woman's status is what determines whether the children will be considered Jews (JJ, p. 137), Epstein says that the son is the center of importance in a Jewish family. He is responsible for the continuation of both his family and his people's divine mission. For this reason, his moral and religious education starts very early. In fact, his first initiation is his circumcision when he is just eight days old (J, p. 164).

Although nowadays a Jewish wedding is conventionally celebrated by a rabbi, Hertzberg says that the Jewish laws allow anybody to do it since it is based on a mutual consent. To make a

marital contract valid, it is only necessary that the bridegroom offer a wedding-ring or any other valuable object to his bride. This has to be witnessed by two male adult Jews (JUD, p. 77). But, in spite of this facility in the celebration of the wedding, there are some restrictions which discipline Jewish marriages. Goldberg and Rayner point out some of them (JJ, p. 413/5):

First of all, Jewish marriage should be monogamous, although in biblical times polygamy was openly practiced. It only started being forbidden during the Middle Ages.

Secondly, a Jewish marriage cannot take place if one of the fiancés is not Jewish. Mixed marriage has been condemned by Judaism since biblical times. The Jews see this prohibition as fundamental not only to their survival as a people, but also to the survival of their religion. As Epstein suggests, this is based on the fact that the coming of strangers to a Jewish community is viewed as a threat to their religion and traditions due to the different cultural and religious background they bring (J, p. 83). Consciously or not, strangers might deviate the Jews from their traditions and divine mission and also disseminate disagreement among them. That's why in different moments of their biblical history, when they had to restore their social and religious order, mixed marriage was definitely forbidden.

The third restriction Goldberg and Rayner present concerns the degree of kinship between the two fiancés. This should be observed in accordance with what is established in Leviticus 18.

Although the Jews see marriage as preferably a permanent institution, their religious laws allow its dissolution. Goldberg and Rayner explain that it is only possible when there is a

serious matrimonial offense and when both spouses agree that there is no possible reconciliation. In some synagogues the civil divorce is sufficient to effect a separation. Others, however, still have a rabinic court whose procedures are based on the Deuteronomy. The divorced man may marry again, whereas the woman is not allowed to (JJ, p. 414/5).

4. THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

Anyone who decides to know at least a little about Judaism will inevitably find out that suffering is a theme inextricably attached to the history and culture of the Jewish people. But, in spite of being such a marked element in the Jews' life, or should I say, for being so, this theme has had different religious approaches and has raised very different speculations.

In early Judaism, as Epstein suggests, suffering was explained as purely the consequence of someone's wrongs in his past (J, p. 57). Thus, if someone suffers it means he did wrong in his past and is being punished for it now. If, on the contrary, someone is happy and prosperous in his current life, it means he was good in his past and is being rewarded for it.

This conception was certainly based on the assumption that Divine Justice interferes and controls the relationships among men. As we have seen, the precept of Divine Justice says that everybody is punished or rewarded in accordance with his doings. Undoubtedly it was this view which supported the well known passivity of the Jews in face of the so severe persecutions they

have suffered along their history. Any mischief that happened to them was viewed as a manifestation of God's will and, consequently, there should be no rebellion against it. Besides, accepting suffering without complaining would be also a way of praising God. Epstein says about this:

> A forma mais elevada de Ksantificação do nome de Deus] é, contudo, aquela exibida na causa de Deus - um heroismo que amiúde leva ao martírio. O herói em tal caso pode ser chamado a defender com a própria vida a sua qualidade de homem como companheiro aliado de Deus. Mesmo todo um povo pode ouvir tal chamada. Os judeus tiveram com freqüência de fazer a escolha no grito: "Sacrifica os ídolos ou morres!" A sua vida através da História pode bem ser considerada uma forma contínua de Ksantificação do nome de Deus] (J, p. 155/8).

These views of suffering seem to have predominated among the ordinary pious Jews. But, parallel to them, Jewish intellectuals and thinkers have raised different speculations and approaches to understand the meaning of suffering and make it coherent with Jewish theology. This started with the prophets, as we can conclude from what Epstein says:

> Os profetas hebreus elevaram-se acima da credulidade que cegamente aceitava uma correspondência direta entre a bondade pessoal e a prosperidade, entre a maldade individual e a miséria (J, p. 57).

As we can see, the prophets refused the so far accepted relationship between man's sufferings and doings, but they did not clarify their correspondence. This task was assumed by intellectuals, thinkers and philosophers who have proposed different solutions to this problem. Goldberg and Rayner present

us some of these solutions (JJ, p. 283/8). It should be said, however, that none of them, for one reason or another, have ever been accepted as definite.

In the Middle Ages, Abraão ibn Daud and Maimônides proposed the theory that what human beings see as evil is not really that. It would be just a misinterpretation of facts. What man sees as evil would be, in fact, just the product of his own mind.

The second theory Goldberg and Rayner present does not deny the existence of evil, but views it as acts of God with a final positive purpose. This is well expressed by Moses Luzatto:

> Isso significa que até mesmo as dificuldades e a aflição são demônios aparentes que, na verdade, são bens... Assim, todos nós deveríamos compreender que tudo o que o Senhor (...) nos fizer, mesmo que afete o nosso corpo e os nossos bens é para nosso benefício, mesmo se não compreendermos como é que nos pode beneficiar (JUD, p. 56/7).

But, Goldberg and Rayner add that his return to God is the benefit man receives from the evils that happen to him. By allowing evil to happen to man, God means to punish him and bring him back to the way of justice and righteousness. In this way, evil becomes a manifestation of Devine Justice which, as we have seen, when punishes man's disagreement or refusal of the divine commands, has also the ultimate objective of bringing him back to his God. Still according to Goldberg and Rayner, this theory was refused in face of the actuality that sometimes just people suffer as much as, or even more than, sinners.

A beyond-death reward for the suffering in this earthly life

is the explanation defended by another current of thought pointed out by Goldberg and Rayner. A very good definition of this assumption is given by Hertzberg:

> Deus também nos informou de que durante toda a nossa permanência neste mundo terreno, Ele mantém um registro das ações de toda gente. A Sua recompensa, contudo, foi reservada para o segundo mundo, que é o mundo da compensação" (JUD, p. 158).

Still another conception says that the sufferings of the just are "punishments of love". These would be, then, a way of God manifesting himself to the just and rewarding them more prodigally in the eternal life.

Among Modern Jewish thinkers, the tendency is either to abandon the search for an explanation to the existence of evil or to approach it in very different ways. One of these is to reject completely the assumption that evil happenings are "acts of God" as they were considered so far. The defender of this thought argued that they cannot be considered "acts of God" since they are openly against Divine Will. But the argument which invalidates this assumption is also pointed out by Goldberg and Rayner. They say:

> Entretanto, [Deus] criou um universo no qual tais coisas podem acontecer, e acontecem. Ele as permite, e não as previne. É nesse único sentido que se pode dizer que Ele é o "responsável" pela "desumanidade do homem para com o próprio homem" (JJ, p. 287).

Finally, contemporary Jewish thinkers question why God does not stop evil if he can do it. The answer, as Goldberg and Rayner

show, might affect directly the concept of God's moral nature:

> Eles dizem ou que Deus é incapaz de evitar o mal, caso em que Ele não é todo-poderoso, ou que Ele não está disposto a evitá-lo, caso em que Ele não é todo-bom (JJ, p. 287).

This dilemma raised two possible answers. The first is that God is not yet omnipotent. In this case, he would need man's cooperation to become so. The second possible answer is that God can really interfere in man's actions but he does not do it because he wants to preserve man's free will.

Hertzberg and Epstein also talk about a doctrine which tries to explain the meaning of suffering in the Jews' life. Says Hertzberg:

> Mas o exílio prosseguiu por muito tempo, especialmente o Segundo Exílio depois do ano 70, e o mais autocrítico dos povos não podia acreditar na realidade que todo aquele sofrimento fosse inteiramente o resultado dos seus próprios pecados. A doutrina do "servo sofredor" foi invocada e ampliada, a doutrina de que o povo de Israel, na misteriosa vontade de Deus, pagava não só pelos seus pecados como pelos pecados dos outros (JUD, p. 122).

To this, we can add this assertion of Epstein:

> Defeitos privados existem - defeitos que em muitos casos foram explicados por gerações de perseguições, isso não altera o fato histórico do martírio de Israel na causa da verdade e dos ideais éticos e religiosos da humanidade (J, p. 155/6).

As we can see, this doctrine gives a universal dimension and meaning to the Jews' suffering. It certainly gains some

consistency when associated with the definition of the Jews as a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). As such, the Jews would have to make offers for mankind's redemption and regeneration. And as Maimönides states in one of his epistles, the sweetest offer one can make to God is his own suffering (qtd. in JUD, p. 23).

NOTES

[1] Epstein, Isidore. **Judaísmo**. (Lisboa-Rio de Janeiro: Editora Ulisseia, 1959), p. 14. From now on this book will be referred in the text by its initial followed by page numbers.

[2] Goldberg, David and John D. Rayner. **Os Judeus e o Judaísmo**. (Rio de Janeiro: Xenon Ed., 1989), p. 311. From now on this book will be referred to in the text by its initials followed by page numbers.

[3] Scofield, C.I. (ed.) **The New Scofield Reference Bible (Holy Bible - Authorized King James Version)**. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). All the other biblical citations used in this work are from this Bible.

[4] Hertzberg, Arthur. **Judaísmo**. (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1964), p. 143. From now on this book will referred to in the text by the initials JUD followed by page numbers.

SECOND CHAPTER

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS

Prize-winning **Goodbye, Columbus**, Philip Roth's first book, was published in 1959 when he was only twenty-six. It is compounded of a novella, which furnishes the book's title, and five short stories previously published in university journals. Like Portnoy's Complaint, Goodbye, Columbus is also considered one of Roth's "most identifiably Jewish books."[1] Of course, this does not mean this work of Roth was received with praise by the American Jewish Community. Spoiling the Jewish leaders' determination to keep an immaculate image of their people, Roth was charged of "exposing bits of dirty linen which, however real, ought not to be shown in public."[2] Truly, since this first work of his, Roth, as we shall see, already expresses his view on religion, although Judaism is not the main concern in the life of his characters.

Definitely, Judaism is far from being a primary element in **"Goodbye, Columbus"** whose main plot is about a summer love affair between two youths, Neil Klugman and Brenda Patimkin. Their romance begins when Neil first meets Brenda at a Country Club and goes on along the season. Although sharing a common Jewish background, the relationship of this young couple is not defined "in terms of classic Jewish values of family and religious tradition but the chivalric myth of knight and lady" in which "Brenda imposes tasks on Neil (...), but at the same time she

appears to be readily paying him for his services (and leading him on to new challenges) with sexual favor"[3]. In the same way, it is not Jewish values that will make Neil acceptable to Brenda's family. As a critic has pointed out, what seems to matter the most for them to accept Neil in their circle is his social possibilities.[4] Anyway, regardless of the weight of religious values in it, Neil and Brenda's relationship comes to an end when the two meet after Brenda's departure to study in Boston. A bitter argument between them evinces that their relationship is not strong enough to overcome their differences in social status and, mainly, in their personal goals and views.

Neil is a young man totally liberated from the traditions and severe moral and social code of his parents. As a third-generation American Jew whose family has not yet achieved a high social status, he was supposed to be eagerly involved in making his way to success. In reality, this seems to be far from being his main goal in life. To begin with, Neil does not care much about his professional life. Asked by Brenda whether he was planning on making a career of his present job, Neil says: "Bren, I'm not planning anything. I haven't planned a thing in three years. At least for the year I've been out of the Army. In the Army I used to plan to go away weekends. I'm - I'm not a planner." And he ends up adding: "I'm a liver,"[5] obviously not referring to the body organ but rather suggesting that he leads his life without serious preoccupation with the future.

As a natural extension of his way of facing life, Neil does not have any serious religious commitment. In spite of having been brought up in an orthodox Jewish family, he develops no

attachment to the religion of his parents. In a private conversation with Brenda's mother, Mrs. Patimkin, Neil defines himself in terms of religion saying: "I'm just Jewish" (GC, p. 70). Such a statement evinces that religion has no relevance in his life. Neil feels no obligation to accept the beliefs or follow the rituals, observances, and customs of his parents' religion. This makes him fit in with that category of Jews, pointed out by Mark E. Workman, for whom "religion constitutes merely a secondary aspect of their lives."[6] Beyond any doubt, Neil is that kind of person who sees religion as just a chance in an individual's life. In the same way that he is "just Jewish" because he was born and brought up in a Jewish family, Neil knows he could have been born a Christian, a Muslim, or as the member of any other religious community. This view, as Somerset Maugham suggests in his book **A Writer's Notebook**, is what makes one realize how absurd and relative the truth of his own religion might be.[7] It is certainly with this concept in his mind that, in a moment of tension and expectation in his life, when Brenda goes to the gynecologist to get a diaphragm, Neil does not hesitate to enter St. Patrick's Cathedral to pray.

This act is extremely significant to define Neil's kind of religiousness. It demonstrates that he believes in God in spite of his indifference towards religious institutions. His concept of God is not limited by creeds. In other words, he has put God above religions. On the other hand, Neil's act could be also understood as a demonstration that he has only apprehended what his religion has of universal. If God exists and is omnipresent,

as he was taught, He can be found anywhere, including a non-Jewish temple.

Although having a different approach towards his religion, Neil's view is completely shared by Ozzie Freedman. Ozzie is the major character in the short story "The Conversion of the Jews." Attending bar-mitzvah lessons held by Rabbi Binder, Ozzie is always in conflict with his instructor on account of his insistence to rationalize some Jewish convictions he is taught. He never accepts the seeming illogical explanations given by Rabbi Binder to his doubts. Due to this, Ozzie's mother has to come to talk with Rabbi Binder on three different occasions.

The first discussion which brings Mrs. Freedman to talk with Rabbi Binder was on the Chosen People conviction. Ozzie does not get satisfied with the rabbi's explanation on political equality and spiritual legitimacy. Binder's attempt consists in conciliating this Jewish conviction with the American Declaration of Independence which says all men are created equal. The second time, Ozzie was not happy with an explanation given by his teacher about a certain behavior of Mrs. Freedman. During free-discussion time, Ozzie relates that his mother, only after seeing eight Jewish names on the casualty list of a plane crash, considered it a tragedy. Ozzie's restless mind was not satisfied with Rabbi Binder's explanation on "cultural unity and some other things." Finally, Ozzie insists in knowing why Rabbi Binder says the Virgin Mary could not have gotten pregnant without having sexual intercourse. In his view, if God can really do anything, to have a virgin woman pregnant should not be of much difficulty for Him.

Taking a closer look at these three disagreements between Ozzie and Rabbi Binder, we can see that although they are on different topics they have a common approach to religion. The points raised by Ozzie are exactly those that when taken radically create and reinforce the barriers between Jews and gentiles. As his family name, Freedman, suggests, Ozzie has a liberal view of religion. Religion should not be something to sort out and bind men in different groups, but rather to free all of them. That's why he is never satisfied with Rabbi Binder's answers and always says that what he wants to know is different. It does not make sense to Ozzie that a human institution, the American Declaration of Independence, proclaims the equality of men whereas his own religion sorts them out; that the death of so many in a plane crash is considered a tragedy only if some of the casualties are Jewish; and finally, that the Christians' beliefs should be so despised when Judaism itself supports them.

On the other hand, Rabbi Binder's view of religion is directly opposed to Ozzie's. He sees religion as something belonging specifically to a people and which makes this people different from others. As his name also suggests, religion is seen as an element that should bind a certain people together. Thus, Rabbi Binder cannot understand and much less accept a serious questioning of his religion although deep inside he might recognize that some of its convictions are totally illogical. Any questioning, then, means a threat to what is more important in his mind: his people's unity and integrity.

This comparison once again makes clear that the basic reason

for the disagreements between Rabbi Binder and Ozzie is their different view of religion. The former's is strict and group-limited while the latter's is liberal and universal. The treatment of this theme in this story certainly aims at a universal dimension in spite of its limitation to the reality of American Jews and Christians. This can be deduced from Ozzie's last demand when on the synagogue roof. He demands that his mother promise "never hit anybody about God" again. What is implied in this request is that religion is not and should never be enough reason to make someone undergo any kind of suffering. In other words, as Darryl Tippens says it is "a pleading for humanity and tolerance in the practice of religion - any religion."[8]

To some extent, Rabbi Binder's view of religion is similar to Sheldon Grossbart's. Grossbart is one of the major characters in the short story "Defender of the Faith." Together with two other youths, namely, Larry Fishbein and Mickey Halpern, they are the only Jewish trainees in a military company at Camp Crowder. The story begins when a new sergeant, Nathan Marx, who is also Jewish, comes from the European theater to serve there. With the arrival of a Jewish superior, Grossbart uses their mutual religious background to get special privileges for him and his two Jewish friends.

Beyond any doubt, Grossbart's behavior is strongly determined by a certain misinterpretation of the religious tenets of Judaism, especially the conviction of the Jews' uniqueness among the other peoples. When asked by Marx why he cannot be like the others, Grossbart says:

> — Because I'm a Jew, sergeant I am different. Better maybe not. But different (CC, p. 141)

Although verbally denying to consider himself better than the gentiles, Grossbart says otherwise with his behavior. It is not out of religiousness that he asks for special orders to be excused from the barracks cleaning to attend services on Friday nights. His subsequent behavior confirms that what Sergeant Marx hears him say during the synagogue services was not just his imagination. In his enthusiasm, Grossbart certainly utters: "Let the goyim clean the floors!" (CC, p. 130).

Since Grossbart's dishonest manipulation of Judaism is not approved by Marx, it leads them into an inevitable conflict. After tolerating many of the trainee's tricks to have privileges, Marx aborts his last one at Camp Crowder. Getting acquainted with a Jew of another section, Grossbart manages to have his name excluded from the list of those going to the battlefield in the Pacific. Aware of what might have happened, Marx has Grossbart's name included back in the list and on account of this is charged by him of anti-Semitism.

The truth, however, is that Marx's act demonstrates how Jewish he is rather than how anti-Semite, as Grossbart wants to see him. Analyzing this last conflict between these two characters, Dan Isaac states that "Marx's sense of Jewishness is so completely aroused that he becomes hostile to the obnoxious and selfish Grossbart when the screw of manipulation is turned one notch too tight."[9]

Marx's answer to Grossbart's accusation of anti-Semitism confirms this foregone interpretation. In their subsequent argument, Marx says that what he had done was "for all of us." Of course, by "all of us" Marx means all Jews, not only those at that military camp. The real intention of his gesture was to defend Judaism against those who Grossbart stands for; those who, not always in an honest way, use the Jewish religion only to get individual privileges; those who spread a negative image of the Jews fostering anti-Semitic feelings.

It is interesting to observe that the religiousness of these two characters expresses what Roth thinks to be relevant in being religious. Grossbart does what his community expects from its members. He attends religious services and observes the traditions of his people, thus pleasing it with a very conventional behavior. Nonetheless, his religiousness is limited to these practices. He is not religious in the sense that religion is a means for man's communion with God and with mankind. It has become a mere instrument by which he can profit. Marx, on the other hand, has no attachment to the rituals and observances of his religion. These were things which he observed only while he was younger and living with his family. In spite of this, he retains the teachings which deal with human nature and try to promote a better understanding in human relationships. This religiousness, which could be adequately named the religion of the heart, is what Roth definitely favors and people like Marx, although not synagogue-goers, are those he considers "real Jews."

Although this is the criterion Roth favors to define a "real Jew" in "Defender of the Faith" and "The Conversion of the Jews," sometimes his fictional characters adopt different ones. An example of this is provided by Aunt Gladys in **Goodbye, Columbus**. In this novella, two groups of Jews can be easily identified: Neil's and Brenda's folks. The most important difference between these groups, at least for those Jews themselves, is their social and financial situation. In the first group, Neil's folks, we have those Jews who have not achieved a great material development in the USA. They still live in Newark, the city where their immigrant ancestors first established two or three generations before. In the second group, Brenda's folks, we have those Jews for whom the basic precept of the American Dream, the rise from rags to riches, came true. Having achieved a better financial situation these Jews indulge in moving to Short Hills, a bourgeois suburb of the city.

It is by her references to the Patimkins that we can detect Aunt Gladys' criterion of being a real Jew and why it excludes Brenda's folks. In a first moment, when Neil is leaving to spend a week at the Patimkins', she says:

> – Since when do Jewish people live in Short Hills? They couldn't be real Jews believe me (GC, p. 49).

In another moment, when Neil tells her he is staying longer with the Patimkins, Aunt Gladys says:

> – You'll stay there too long you'll be too good for us (GC, p. 62).

What Aunt Gladys means is that she does not consider the Patimkins real Jews because Short Hills is a section where only bourgeois and assimilationist Jews live. In her view, the Jews of that section are traitors of the Jewish traditions.

Although awkward to define someone's religiousness, Aunt Glady's criterion has some rationale to support it. First of all, it is partly a reflection of the predominant attitude toward the "nouveaux riches" American Jewry in the first half of this century, the time when "Goodbye, Columbus" takes place. This attitude is well-expressed by the writer Doris Lilly when she says: "When one has ten million dollars, one is no longer Jewish."[10] According to this view, any American Jew who becomes rich has necessarily undergone a complete assimilation to the large American culture. Implicit is also the charge that many of the Jewish traditions were abandoned in favor of this Americanization process.

Yet, Aunt Gladys' view has also an explanation in religion itself. The place where the Klugmans live indicates that the Jewish characters in "Goodbye, Columbus" are descendants of the Eastern European Jews who came to the USA between 1871 and 1951. For these Jews, specifically those who had a Russian background, poverty was highly honored. Talking about this, Stephen Birmingham says in his book "The Rest of Us": "Poverty itself was holy. The poor man was more blessed than the rich man - the Talmud taught this, and the rabbis preached it. God and Mammon could not both be worshiped. To be a Jew was to be poor, and to

suffer."[11] It is based on such religious teachings that Aunt Gladys understandably disregards the Patimkins as being real Jews.

Other similar teachings have certainly determined the kind of person Leo Patimkin is now. For his failures in both his personal and professional life, Leo, Mr. Patimkin's half-brother, comes out to be the Jewish sufferer in "Goodbye, Columbus". Although he married at the age of thirty-five, he thinks he was too young when he did it. He definitely feels no pleasure in the company of his wife, Bea, and their three-year-old daughter. After his work, he prefers to go to a bar rather than come back home and stay with them. Besides, Bea is not the woman Leo has loved most in his life. The one he really loved was a certain Hannah Schreiber whom he met almost twenty years before, but who is still in his mind and makes him dream of his past life.

In spite of such a situation, it is in his professional life that Leo experiences his greatest frustration. Leo is a "quality bulb" salesman and although he works hard every day he never manages to amass a fortune like his brother. The main reason for his failure, as he himself recognizes, is his strong honesty. Leo insists in his business because he believes the bulbs he sells have good quality and they last longer than the others. The result of such an honesty is a total inadaptability to the American system; Leo knows he lives in a society where anything goes when it involves making money. Better products could be produced and offered to the public, however, "the big boys" only make products that soon wear out and have to be replaced. After all, what prevails in such a society is expressed in Ben

Patimkin's assertion that "you need a little of the [thief] in you" if you want to thrive in business. In a system that works like this, an idealist like Leo will be always "the little guy."

It is because he is aware of this reality of his that Leo advises Neil to be practical in his decision to marry Brenda. His suggestion is that instead of her beauty what he should take into consideration is especially Brenda's father's wealth. Although saying that he is a practical man because "[he is] on the bottom, so [he] gotta be" (GC, p. 84), in his everyday life Leo still behaves like the stereotype of Job. He keeps doing the same kind of business, with the same honesty, craving for success but at the same time knowing that it will never come to him.

If Leo Patimkin cannot live up to his own conception of being practical in life, the same, as his assertion above demonstrates, cannot be said about Ben Patimkin. Regardless of the adequacy of the criterion used by Aunt Gladys, the truth remains that Brenda's father and his family are really assimilationist Jews. The first indication of it, which is Aunt Gladys' criterion itself, is their moving to Short Hills which works as a metaphor to their complete assimilation and integration into the American mainstream. Still another very relevant indication of this is their nose fixing. Here, Roth starts using this metaphor which will be better developed later on in **Portnoy's Complaint**. In Roth's fictional world the typical salient Jewish nose works as a token of the Jews' cultural identity. In this way, a Jew having his own nose fixed means an attempt to disguise his own culture. This is certainly the

meaning implied in Brenda's and Ron's nose fixing. Furthermore, there is also Mr. Patimkin's somewhat proud statement about his children: "They're goyim, my kids, that's how much they understand" (GC, p. 75). Their assimilation is, then, a process in which they dive deeper and deeper consciously and willingly.

Although in "Goodbye, Columbus" Roth deals with this theme of assimilationist Jews against conservative ones, it is in "Eli, the Fanatic" that he goes deeper into it. This story takes place in a small town called Woodenton where, coming from the war in Europe, Leo Tzuref establishes a rabbinical seminary. Eighteen Jewish orphan children and an adult refugee, known in the city as "the greenie," live in Tzuref's community. It is precisely the figure of the greenie, walking on orthodox Jewish clothes in the streets of Woodenton, that brings about a conflict between Tzuref and the Jewish community of that city. The greenie's clothes bother Woodenton's Jews because, having been rejected by the American Jewish Reform since the 19th century, it started being seen as inappropriate to their new reality in the New World. In the greenie's case, however, his garments, more than an inadequacy, are seen as a threat to the harmonical and peaceful understanding they have achieved with the gentiles of Woodenton. Afraid of having this situation spoiled, the Jewish community of Woodenton plan to expel Tzuref and his community from the city under the allegation of their failing to comply with the township zoning of the city. To carry this out they appoint a Jewish attorney, Eli Peck.

Eli, however, is far from being the most appropriate person to carry out such a task. Although being an assimilationist, deep

inside he suffers the conflict of those Jews who are still divided between their forebears' traditions and the large American culture. In Dan Isaac's words "within [Eli] two competing cultures are struggling for dominance. America's homemade moral system of rational pragmatism does battle with a weaker but more ancient and durable adversary, traditional Judaism."[12] Getting involved into the dispute between the Jews of Woodenton and Tzuref only makes this conflict come to surface and eventually causes Eli to have a nervous breakdown which comes to be the third in his life.

It is evident that Eli, at least in the beginning of the story, takes the mode of life of the Jews of Woodenton, which is also his own, as the right one whereas Tzuref's community's is regarded as totally wrong. This feeling is illustrated by the words used by the narrator to describe the old mansion where Tzuref lives, probably adopting Eli's point of view: empty, halfway hidden, no books, no draperies, no rugs, noisy hinges, dimness. The predominance of such words in the description of Tzuref's place gives the idea that everything around it is morbid, sad, and undesirable. At the same time, Woodenton is always associated with light, giving us the opposite idea. Thus, referring to it, there are sentences such as: "Keeping his eyes on the lights of Woodenton, he headed down the path" (GC, p. 189) and a little further on: "Eli hurried towards the lights" (GC, p. 190).

Eli's identification with the Jews of Woodenton is also expressed in his own words. In their argument when he calls on

Tzuref for the second time, he says referring to the Jews of Woodenton: "I am them, they are me, Mr. Tzuref" (GC, p. 198). However, the development of the argument provokes a change in Eli's mind. He, then, assumes a position of independence towards both sides which is expressed when he says: "I am me. They are them. You are you" (GC, p. 199).

Eli does not succeed in keeping this position of no commitment. As a reflection of what is going on in his inner self, i.e., his attempt to solve his cultural conflict, he tries desperately to conciliate these two opposite sides. His conciliatory efforts show that Eli is unable to take a firm and definite position with those whom he pleads for. He always wishes he were pleading for the opposite, no matter the side where he is now. Although this seems to be a sign of weakness, it is, in fact, a demonstration of Eli's extreme sensitivity. He recognizes as fair the strong desire of the Jews of Woodenton not to have their current social situation altered. After all, as Eli himself understands, that is what their forebears always craved for during the many years of persecution and suffering they had to undergo. On the other hand, he also fully understands that Tzuref and his community have the right to practice their religion as they think they should. After all, he seems to think, there is no harm or shame in living in accordance with orthodox ideas if this is what one wishes. Besides, Eli, as a lawyer, knows this is a right literally guaranteed by the American Constitution.

Although Eli's conciliatory attempt temporarily solves the dispute between the Jewish community of Woodenton and Tzuref, it is fatal to his psychological stability. Eli manages to make the

greenie wear regular clothes, which satisfies his clients. But, this raises an extreme guilt feeling in him when he sees how uncomfortable and humiliated the greenie feels in those clothes. Ridden by the desire to redeem his fault and be in peace with himself, Eli, already undergoing a mental disturbance, dresses the greenie's former clothes and shows himself to both the greenie and the Jews of Woodenton. While doing so, Eli is half aware of the whole strangeness of his behavior but, at the same time, he feels as if he does not have another choice except going on in his entreprise.

Despite his good will, Eli's gesture is doomed to fail. It will solve neither the conflict between the Jews of Woodenton and Tzuref nor his own personal conflict. As Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. says, Eli will be eventually brought back to normalcy by a psychiatrist and the rabbinical seminary will be expelled sooner or later.[13] What will remain to Eli is the recognition of the impossibility of conciliating two so disparate cultures.

Although the assimilationist Jews in this story have almost completely forgotten their traditions to the point that Ted Heller ignores such a well-known biblical story like Isaac's sacrifice, this is not the rule throughout the other stories of the book. In a way or another, those Jewish characters have or have had some sort of attachment to Judaism. For instance, in **"Goodbye, Columbus"** either conservative or assimilationist, the two groups of Jews observe some religious activities. But these activities only demonstrate that the gap separating them is really large. For Aunt Gladys, religion has a more humanitarian

and emotional connotation. One of her greatest joys, pointed out by Neil, is "making threadbare bundles for what she still referred to as the Poor Jews in Palestine" (GC, p. 13). In another moment, she cries when Neil tells her he is going away for Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year Day. For her, the religious parties mean a celebration which brings the whole family together. It is a moment when the kin can meet one another and share their common experiences.

For Brenda's folks, however, religion has become a kind of social activity. Their engagement in both Hadassah or Binai B'rith has rather a showing-off interest. These Jewish associations only provide them the opportunity to meet other Jews and evaluate their social status. The dialogue between Neil and Mrs. Patimkin evinces this fact. Asked whether she knew Martin Buber's work, Neil realizes that she is "piqued either, at [his] evasiveness or at the possibility that Buber attended Friday night services without a hat, and Mrs. Buber had only one set of dishes in her kitchen" (GC, p. 70). Talking about this replacement of authentic religious values for capitalistic ones, Baumgarten and Gottfried state that "the Patimkins are held together as a family by a system of programmed responses to conspicuous consumption, including food, rather than the values of the close-knit family of the urban Jewish neighborhood." [14] Religious values have lost any significance in their everyday life. That's why Mr. Patimkin is not scrupulous in saying that it is necessary a bit of thievery to succeed in business as he has done. He is certainly one of those many Jews whose "Jewishness [is] relegated to the privacy of their homes, families, and

temples and synagogues, if any."[15]

A similar comparison can be traced between Sergeant Nathan Marx and Sheldon Grossbart, the major characters in "Defender of the Faith." Although not being attached to the rituals and traditions of Judaism, Marx has a tender feeling towards them. For him, religion is associated with good memories, especially with his family. In his view, it is an element which helps to narrow and strengthen the relationship between people. On the other hand, we have Grossbart who, as we have already seen, is always proclaiming his attachment to his religion, but, in fact, only uses it to have privileges. For him, religion works as a means to take advantages in any situation by manipulating the others.

Grossbart is not the only one who misuses the traditions of his religion. Others, likewise, also do it, although innocently. For instance, when describing his mother's lighthing of the Sabbath candles, Ozzie, the major character in "The Conversion of the Jews," says that she looks "like a woman who [knows] momentarily God [can] do anything," (GC, p. 110) although at other moments she does not look like a chosen person. What he suggests is that in their rituals not only the Jews, but all pious people seem to believe in God's almightiness and universality. However, they do not behave in accordance with their faith in their everyday life, specifically, in the case of this short story in their relationship with people of different beliefs.

Together with Mrs. Freedman we also have the figure of Yakov

Blotnik, the custodian in the synagogue where Ozzie studies. With his endless prayers, Blotnik has made of the act of praising God a mechanical procedure without any value at all. In Ozzie's view, "Blotnik had been mumbling so steadily for so many years (...) he had memorized the prayers and forgotten all about God" (GC, p. 110). Still another very interesting characteristic of his religiousness is that for him "things [are] either good-for-the-Jews or no-good-for-the-Jews" (GC, p. 114), i.e., religion sorts out people.

The attitude of such people like Mrs. Freedman and Blotnik is a direct consequence of the kind of religious education they have received. Essentially, since they are children the Jews are taught to accept a set of beliefs and rules and rituals without ever reflecting seriously on them. In what concerns their religion, they are never taught or allowed to use what man has of most peculiar: his capacity of reasoning. This can be deduced from the kind of education Ozzie receives now which, certainly, is similar to that received by his forebears. When reading from the Hebrew book, Ozzie does it slowly in order to grasp what it says. Rabbi Binder, however, demands that he should read fast in spite of Ozzie's saying he cannot understand it when reading so. In this way, people are only supposed to accept passively what they are taught in terms of religion. There is no room for a serious questioning and searching of truth.

Regardless of the spiritual value of her devotion, the fact of Mrs. Freedman's performing religious rituals is already significant in itself. It fits in with Arthur Hertzberg's assertions about the role of the Jewish mother in America which

consists mainly in being responsible for the preservation of the religious traditions in her family.[16] In the same way, Aunt Gladys, as we have already seen, is also responsible for the maintenance of the religious activities in her family. This is also true about Brenda's mother. Although having a different view of religion, Mrs. Patimkin, like Aunt Gladys, is also the one who keeps religion alive in her family. In her dialogue with Neil, she makes their religion and their family's attachment to it the main theme in discussion. It is then that she expresses how much she values one's religious commitment. For her, taking part in Jewish associations such as Hadassah and B'nai B'rith is a demonstration of one's interest in his religion and in his religious life as well.

It is not only their concerns with religion that make these women typical Jewish mothers. Their relationship with their children also follows a kind of established pattern. Although not being the real mother of Neil, Aunt Gladys assumes the role of the typical Jewish mother. She watches as closely as possible each aspect and detail of Neil's life: his eating, clothing, friendships and so on. In spite of all her smothering cares, Neil does not have a conflicting relationship with Aunt Gladys. He gets along well with her by ignoring her overprotection and taking her as crazy.

The way Neil's mother treated him when they were together was not very different from Aunt Gladys'. Talking with Brenda about his school years, Neil says: "In high school we had to run a mile every month. So we wouldn't be Mamma's boys. I think the

bigger your lungs get the more you're supposed to hate your mother" (GC, p. 58). From this statement, one can easily deduce that Neil, like many other Jewish boys, hated his mother for making him a "Mamma's boy." Evidently, Mrs. Klugman was not an exception to the rule in what concerns the welfare of her son.

Like Neil's, Brenda's relationship with her mother is not easy, either. Unlike him, however, she is not able to become immune to her mother's pressures. In Brenda's view, the reason for her conflict with her mother is that Mrs. Patimkin is jealous of her. However, a deeper and more meaningful reason can be detected in their constant disagreement. As her letter reveals, Mrs. Patimkin's relationship with her daughter was good when Brenda was a little girl and could be controlled by her parents. Once she became an adult, this situation changed. Brenda assumed a posture of independence which went directly against her mother's. Daughter of rich and assimilationist Jews, Brenda lives in accordance with her reality, indulging in some extravagance and with no commitment to religion. In her mother's view, such behavior is unacceptable.

The origin of Mrs. Patimkin's intolerance towards Brenda can be found in her past. Having been born in a poor family, as her place of origin indicates, Mrs. Patimkin is unable to enjoy her present wealthy life without some guilt feeling. Her keeping the furniture from Newark in the storeroom means not only that she still has memories of her past but that she also makes a point of keeping them alive. It assuages her sensation of having betrayed what she has left behind. Besides, she is certainly also haunted by those foregone teachings about the value of poverty. For these

reasons, then, Brenda's way of life, enjoying what her money can afford, is seen by her as an outrage, causing their difficult relationship.

This analysis of **Goodbye, Columbus** has demonstrated how Philip Roth approaches Judaism in the beginning of his career as a writer. In this first book, the Jewish characters have different degrees of involvement as well as different ways of approaching and relating to their religion. Together with this, Roth also explores the conflicts lived by these Jewish characters, which are of two different natures. They are conflicts either between Jews themselves on account of their differences in religious matters and social status or of a psychological sort, showing the individual as a helpless victim of the shock between two quite different cultures. As we shall see, this treatment of Judaism in **Goodbye, Columbus** adds up to the way Roth will develop this theme in his subsequent works.

NOTES

[1] Rodgers Jr., Bernard F. Philip Roth. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 19

[2] Leer, Norman. "Escape and Confrontation in the Short Stories of Philip Roth." (Christian Scholar, 49, 1966), p. 132

[3] Baumgarten, Murray and Gottfried, Barbara. Understanding Philip Roth. (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 21, 24

[4] Nilsen, Helge Normann. "Love and Identity: Neil Klugman's Quest in 'Goodbye, Columbus'." (English Studies, i, 1987)

[5] Roth, Philip. Goodbye, Columbus. (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 44. From now on this book will be referred to in the text by its initials followed by page numbers.

[6] Workman, Mark E. "The Serious Consequences of Ethnic Humor in Portnoy's Complaint." (Midwestern Folklore, 13, 1, 1987), p. 23

[7] Maugham, W. Somerset. A Writer's Notebook. (Great Britain: Penguin Book, 1967), p. 26

[8] Tippens, Darryl. "The Shechinah Theme in Roth's "Conversion of the Jews." (Christianity & Literature, 35, 3, 1986), p. 18

[9] Isaac, Dan. "In Defense of Philip Roth." In Critical Essays on Philip Roth, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 190

[10] Cited in Birmingham, Stephen. "The Rest of Us." (New York: Berkley Books, 1985), p. 282

[11] Birmingham, p. 237

[12] Isaac, Dan, id., ibid.

[13] Rodgers, Jr., p. 31

[14] Baumgarten and Gottfried, p. 31

[15] Birmingham, p. 350

[16] Hertzberg, Arthur. The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History - qtd by John Higham in "The Pot That Didnât Melt." (New York Review of Books, XXXVII, 6, 1990), p. 12

THIRD CHAPTER

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT

After having some parts of it previously published in **New American Review**, **Partisan Review**, and **Esquire**, it is in 1969 that Philip Roth's **Portnoy's Complaint** is finally released as a novel. Preceeded by a huge publicity and great expectations, this raised some enthusiastic commentaries by critics like Albert Goldman who said about it: (...) this year a real literary-cultural event portends and every shepherd of public opinion, every magus of criticism, is wending his way toward its site."[1] In a similar way, Sanford Pinsker would state that "it seemed a sure bet that the decade would end with a literary bang."[2]

The predicted success was certainly fulfilled. In the wake of it, as it should be expected, many people set out to dissect the components of Roth's novel and try to explain them. In so doing is that Pinsker points out three levels of significance in its very title. According to him the word "complaint" works "as a 'complaint' in the legalistic sense of an indictment handed down against those cultural forces that have created him; as a "complaint' in the old-fashioned sense of illness (...); and, finally, as a 'complaint' in the more ordinary, 'existential' sense of the word."[3]

The structure of **Portnoy's Complaint** undoubtedly reflects this first level of significance which Pinsker sees in its title. Narrated by a psychiatric analysand, the novel is written in a

flashback/flashforward style, in the first person singular and with a loose and colloquial language. Lying down on a couch, Alexander Portnoy, the protagonist, tells Dr. Spielvogel his inner conflicts and some ocurrences of his past which he identifies as being their causes.

Portnoy's conflict is basically a matter of cultural misplacedness. Having been raised up under the influence of two different cultures, he does not manage to achieve a complete identification with either of them. In his attempt of self-understanding, he points out two factors which have played a tremendously important role in his life and have made him the kind of person he is now: his parents and the religious education they gave him.

Portnoy is a Jew, or at least he is the member of a Jewish family. Along his life, he has never been deeply attached to his parents' religion. He literally denies and refuses to accept their beliefs. However, more than mere words will be necessary for him to get rid of religious influence on his life, if ever he does. According to Gershon Shaked, in **Portnoy's Complaint**, "o tópico central do romance é a recusa do herói em adaptar-se à vida judaica burguesa e sua incapacidade de sair desse círculo vicioso de uma vez por todas."[4] The truth is that, although Portnoy does not realize it at first, Jewishness is profoundly rooted in him. It is already a part of his own being.

To begin with, Jewishness is a part of Portnoy's being even in his physical characteristics. This is something he has to share with his relatives in spite of his refusal to follow their religion. Although there is not a detailed physical depiction of

the Jewish characters in Portnoy's Complaint, we can still observe that they have been attributed some traits which are typical of the Jewish stereotype. Two of these characteristics are especially significant: the characters' hair and nose.

Like the Jewish stereotype, Portnoy's and his father's hair is "a wild bush the color and texture of steel wool"[5] or, as Portnoy describes it in another passage a "kinky black Hebe hair" (PC, p. 149).

But, certainly the nose of these characters, described several times with terms such as "big" and "long bumpy" and "that eloquent appendage," is their most evident Jewish physical characteristc. Such a peculiarity seems to become too evident in a society where the majority of people have a quite different shape of nose. At least this is the way Portnoy faces it. It has become an obsession of his to compare his big and beaky nose with the WASPs'[6] which, unlike his, "is hardly even there" (PC, p. 118) and "points northward automatically at birth" (PC, p. 134). In his "adoration" of the **shikses'** nose, Portnoy produces very funny comments such as the following:

> - and those noses, mystery of the mysteries! each disappears entirely into a cup full of chocolate and marshmallows and comes out at the other end unblemished by liquid! (PC, p. 135)

But more than an obsession, Portnoy's nose works as a token, or better, an accusation of his cultural identity. It reveals to everybody, especially to the gentiles with whom he deals, that he is a Jew. Reflecting upon it, Portnoy says: "(...) kid, you have

J-E-W written right across the middle of that face -" (PC, p. 138). In his family circle, his Jewish nose also works as his "parents' agent" when Portnoy flirts with "shikses." Feeling that he is unable to disguise his semite characteristics to the family of one of his gentile girl-friends with whom he is going to spend Easter, he asserts with a bit of exaggeration that "a man's cartilage is his fate" (PC, p. 205).It is in this way that Portnoy's bonds with Judaism begin, with its presence on his own body. For him, it is only a matter of looking at a mirror every morning to remember his origins, his Jewish status.

Nevertheless, Portnoy's hair and nose are neither the only nor the strongest reminder of his cultural identity. His parents are definitely the most intense and vivid presence of Judaism in his life. Even when physically absent, they are still present in Portnoy's mind, not allowing him to forget his religious bonds for a single moment. This, in fact, is an experience shared by many Jewish children which, as Gershon Shaked suggests in his book **Sombras de Identidade**, has become a recurrent theme in Jewish literature.

This imposition of religion becomes an almost unbearable burden for Portnoy, especially for involving a rivalry with the gentiles. As a Jewish child, therefore supposed to consider himself different from the majority for being a member of the Chosen People, Portnoy is constantly demanded to demonstrate he is superior to the gentile children. His performance, especially in his social and academic life, should be an example to be followed by anyone. In fact, these demands from him are only part

of a process apparently well-known by Jews and which Allan Warren Friedman calls "'the Einstein syndrome', which proclaims (as any Jewish mother will tell you) that all Jewish boys are born brilliant."[7]

Such kind of demands from Jewish parents should be taken as coherent, especially if they live in the USA, a society known for the strong competition among its citizens. Nevertheless, since it has as its strongest prompting element a religious and ethnic rivalry, it, in reality, becomes a setback for their children's integration into this society to which, regardless their creed or ethnic group, they belong. Besides, this atittude goes against what American Jews like Portnoy learn in their academic life. That is, they live in a country ruled by the principle of equality among men and in this same country their people have never undergone discrimination or persecution as they had in the Old World.

Thus, it is for their role in this cultural conflict that Jewish parents become detestable tyrants to their children. With an impressive image, Portnoy describes the resentment these children feel toward their parents. He sees himself and the other Jewish children as prisoners "moaning and groaning" in their bunks while "rolling through (...) heavy seas of guilt." He says:

> (...) so I sometimes envision us, me and my fellow wailers, melancholics, and wise guys, still in steerage, like our forebears - and oh sick, sick as dogs, we cry out intermittently, one of us or another, 'Poppa, how could you?' 'Momma, why did you?' And the stories we tell, as the big ship pitches and rolls, the vying we do - who had the most castrating mother, who the most benighted father, I can match you, you bastard, humiliation

> for humiliation, shame for shame... the retching in the toilets after meals, the hysterical deathbed laughter from the bunks, and the tears - here a puddle wept in contrition, here a puddle from indignation - in the blinking of an eye, the body of a man (with the brain of a boy) rises in impotent rage to flail at the mattress above, only to fall instantly back, lashing itself with reproaches. Oh, my Jewish men friends! My dirty-mouthed guilt-ridden brethen! My sweethearts! My mates! Will this fucking ship ever stop pitching? When? When, so that we can leave off complaining how sick we are - and go out into the air, and live! (PC, p. 110)

This passage gives a perfect idea of the way Portnoy sees the relationship with his parents.

Yet, this situation is not merely a difficult parent-child relationship. There is a strong element determining the way it is: religion. Jack and Sophie Portnoy are the embodiment of Judaism, with its values and traditions, in the life of their son. Describing the relationship between Portnoy and his parents, Shaked says: "Seu vínculo com eles e sua dependência não são os de um indivíduo chamado Alex Portnoy com um homem e uma mulher que são seus pais, mas os de um membro da tribo judaica com todos os seus chefes"[8].

However, it is not only for passing their religious values and traditions to his son that Jack and Sophie are such tyrants for Portnoy. It is the exaggeration with which they pursue their objective of making him a nice Jewish boy. They watch every detail of their son's life. Their worries involve all aspects of his life such as eating, clothing, friendships, career, marriage, etc. This situation continues even when Portnoy becomes an adult. In his present life, at the age of thirty-three and living in New

York, Portnoy has to call his parents every day to appease their affliction about his welfare.

Although both his parents have such a marked presence in Portnoy's life, it is undeniably Sophie who has influenced, or better, "smothered" him most. Indeed, the first chapter of the novel "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met" is entirely dedicated to her character. The narrator opens it saying: "She was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teacher was my mother in disguise" (PC, p. 07). In the same way, along his whole life, Portnoy will always feel the presence of his mother around him. She becomes a kind of voice in his mind that reinforces his inner conflicts and reminds him constantly of his Jewish status. Shaked states that "para [Portnoy], a mãe judia é a representante da sociedade judaica - sua vida, seus costumes e seu modo de pensar".[9]

In Arthur Hertzberg's The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History, we can find a good hint to understand what Sophie Portnoy really represents in her family. Hertzberg talks about the American immigrant Jews' attempt to keep their cultural identity at the same time that they try to integrate into the American system. In this context, analyzing the role of the Jewish mother in her family in a situation where the father has become an image of failure to the young, he says:

> As the protector of the children, (...) she becomes the source of family loyalty and the guardian of ethnic continuity. She could encourage her sons to reach for success in the large world - to do for

> her what her husband failed to do - while binding them to her and to their heritage with ties of love[10].

For all these good intentions of theirs, Jewish mothers, as Shaked explains, also become to their children a strong barrier separating them from the outside world. The inevitable result, as it happens to Portnoy, is that these children develop a mixed-up feeling of love and hate for their mother.

Bearing all these characteristics, Sophie becomes a modern representation of the Jewish mother stereotype transported from Eastern Europe, where she originally appeared, to the United States. One of the main characteristics of this typical mother, as they were pointed out by Moacyr Scliar in **A Condição Judaica**, is that she is very supportive and hysterical in what concerns the protection of her children[11]. Beyond doubt, these are strong characteristics in Sophie's personality. She goes to extremes on account of her son's welfare. That explains why she threatens him with a bread knife in face of his refusal to eat his dinner. She assumes to be the one who knows what is the best for her son, and she feels she has to make him live in accordance with that even if it means to threaten him with death.

This passage of the novel allows an intertextuality with the Bible which helps to clarify parent-children relationship in **Portnoy's Complaint**. It keeps some similarities with the episode of Isaac's sacrifice. As it is related in the book of Genesis, God puts Abraham to the test by ordering him to offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. Abraham proceeds in accordance with God's words until the moment of killing his son when an

angel stops him. This story seems to symbolize an attitude which is predominant among Jewsish parents, i.e., to put religious laws and principles above human dignity. For them, the law should never be broken no matter the strength of a possible justification to do it. That's why, understandably, Portnoy shouts at his parents almos in despair: **I happen also to be a human being!** (PC, p. 72).

With such a view of the law and its consequent behavior, Jewish parents, as the embodiment of Jewish values and traditions in the life of their children, show what their religion expect of them. That is, a blind obedience and an acceptance of their rules and regulations as eternal verities. These attitude is certainly based on principles like the one pointed out by Isidore Epstein who says: "A forma mais elevada de Kidalush Hashem [santificação do nome divino] é (...) aquela exibida na causa de Deus - um heroísmo que amiúde leva ao martírio"[12]. Thus, a Jew should never see his life as being more important than his religious principles. History as well shows that this precept has been observed, if not by all Jews, at least by a large majority of them. Talking about the pogroms that took place in Russia in the turn of the century, Mark Zborowski says in his book **Life Is With People** that "there [were] too many instances of Jews who [had] accepted avoidable death rather than violate the Sabbath..."[13]

Aware of this strong trait in the Jewish tradition, one can well understand the tragic outcome of parent-children relationship in **Portnoy's Complaint**. The two cases that are narrated besides Portnoy's itself, Ronald's suicide and Heshie's

argument with his family, have an unhappy conclusion. In both of them, the children eventually die early in life as a direct or indirect consequence of their relationship with their parents.

At least in Ronald's case, Portnoy is dead sure of the linking between his friend's suicide and his parents' oppressive education:

> What do we want, me and Ronald and Leonard? To be left alone! If only for half an hour at a time! Stop already hocking us to be good! hocking us to be nice! Just leave us alone, God damn it, to pull our little dongs in peace and think our little selfish thoughts (...) (PC, p. 113)

Ronald's last act is a strong indication that his suicide has really something to do with the pressure put on him by his parents to be "good" and "nice." Before dying he leaves a message to his mother saying a friend of hers had called about the mah-jongg rules for that night's game. This evinces how great was the influence of his parents on him. Even in face of committing suicide he was unable to rebel against them.

In the case of Heshie, Portnoy's cousin, the reason of his argument with his family is Alice Dembosky, his gentile girl-friend. Revolted against his father's direct interference to stop their courtship, Heshie fights with him. But, in spite of being physically superior to his father, Heshie willingly capitulates to him and resigns to his family's imposition. Soon after, he goes to the war where he dies.

Reflecting upon his cousin's attitude, Portnoy senses there is "some enigma at its center, a profound moral truth" (PC, p.

62) which he cannot grasp. Beyond doubt, this enigma and moral truth Portnoy tries to understand is the reason why someone should abdicate his happiness and dignity on account of a set of rules and regulations imposed by his parents and their traditions.

Neither Ronald nor Heshie were able to grasp this truth as well. Although their parents with their traditions meant a detestable burden on their shoulders, they were never able to break up with them to grow in their own individuality. Their eventual submission to their parents' will is undoubtedly a reflection of what they were taught. Passivity and renunciation seem to be the great heritage they received from their forebears. Thus, death is their only way to freedom.

Portnoy's attitude, however, is very different from Ronald's and Heshie's. He decides to fight against his parents and their traditions for his own autonomy what is already a denial of his people's tradition. Besides, his ideal of freedom adds up to his assimilation of some elements of the large American culture. Unlike his people's tradition, Portnoy's academic life has taught him the necessity and value of fighting for one's own freedom.

Nevertheless, to abandon his Jewishness totally is not an easy task for a Jewish-educated boy. Although no longer performing the rituals and observances of his religion, Portnoy cannot take its influence out of his inner self since Jewishness is already deeply rooted in him. It is now like a ghost haunting his existence and filling him with guilt feeling for not conforming to it. This is manifested in the fact that he always brings out his Jewishness in his arguments with gentile girl-

friends which, in Shaked's words, is the attitude of "um homem que não está liberado psicologicamente de sua tribo."[14]

Portnoy becomes, thus, a man divided between two different cultures. He can neither accept one and despise the other completely nor reconcile both of them. The kind of person he becomes as an adult reflects this lack of equilibrium in his cultural identity. He is professionally and intellectually successful, but emotionally he is still dependant on his parents. It seems that his intellect will never beat his emotions and so he is condemned to suffer the influence of his parents for his lifetime. He recognizes that, like other Jewish children, he is meant to be a child as long as his parents live because "a Jewish man with parents alive is a fifteen-year-old boy and will remain a fifteen-year-old boy till they die!" (PC, p. 103)

At this point, a comparison between the characteristics of these three Jewish boys mentioned above is very significant. It will demonstrate that each one of them is a very different kind of person whose only point in common with the others is to have their fate molded by their difficult relationship with their parents. Due to the traits of their personality and their body, we can place Ronald and Heshie at different extremes whereas Portnoy would be in a midway between them. Ronald has an artistic soul. He is "a born pianist" (PC, p. 93), "José Iturbi the Second" (PC, p. 90), as the women define him. With an introverted personality, he does not have much physical expression. Portnoy describes him as a "tall emaciated teen-age catatonic (...)" (PC, p. 92). And he still adds: "(...) every limb strung so tight to

his backbone that if you touched him, he would probably have begun to hum... and the fingers, of course, those long white grotesqueries, seven knuckles at least before you got down to the nicely gnawed nail (...)" (PC, p. 92). In an evident contrast with Ronald, Heshie is an extroverted guy who apparently has well-developed muscles. Leading a sportsman life he works out every day with weights and is "the third best javelin thrower in all New Jersey (...)" (PC, p. 61). Unlike both Ronald and Heshie, Portnoy dedicates neither to arts nor to his physical performance. His outstanding characteristic is rather his intellect. He is the "A" student, "Albert Einstein the Second!" (PC, p. 08).

Two observations can be raised from the story of these three Jewish boys. First of all, it reveals the influence Jewish parents have over their children regardless the kind of person they are or their physical or intellectual capacity. They will never get entirely rid of their parents. Secondly, Portnoy's is a representation of an experience undergone by many other people like him, i.e., third-generation educated American Jews. In this way, his story fits in with Baumgarten and Gottfried's assertion that "in Roth's work individual events become representative of the experiences of the group, for his subject is not one character's life but the life experiences of a generation."[15]

Still another Jewish characteristic revealed by the relationship between Portnoy and his parents is his treatment as the central figure of the family. According to Epstein, the sons are considered so because they can continue their own family and also assure "a continuidade do papel divinamente destinado a

Israel"[16]. That he is privileged to the detriment of his sister Hannah is a situation that is not disguised by the members of Portnoy's family, as he himself recognizes:

> Of my sallow, overweight older sister, my mother would say (in Hannah's presence, of course: honesty was her policy too), 'The child is no genius, but then we don't ask the impossible. God bless her, she works hard, she applies herself to her limits, and so whatever she gets is all right.' Of me, the heir to her long Egyptian nose and clever babbling mouth, of me my mother would say, with characteristic restraint, 'This bonditt? He doesn't even have to open a book - "A" in everything. Albert Einstein the Second!' (PC, p. 08).

Hannah is such an insignificant character in the family that when adult Portnoy can only recall a few memories involving her. She is not demanded much by Sophie and Jack. On the contrary, a lot is demanded and expected from Portnoy. In his father's view, he is "the family's opportunity to be 'as good as anybody,' [their] chance to win honor and respect (...)" (PC, p. 09).

But, as we have already seen, Portnoy definitely refuses to play the role of the nice Jewish boy. He does not accept to become what his parents want him to be. And, as it should be expected, this rebellion of his also spreads out to what his parents represent in his life: Jewish traditions and values. In his revolt, Portnoy ironizes and despises some of the most basic traditions and values of Judaism such as the doctrine of the Chosen People and the dietary laws. However, it should be said that in Portnoy's Complaint, these religious elements are not approached as eternal verities, i.e., in their theological

nature, but rather in a social and psychological perspective. It is in their implications in the life of an American Jew living in WASP-dominated society that they are approached and, in the same way, in the problem of Jews-gentiles relationship as a whole.

This can be already observed in Portnoy's treatment of the dietary laws. As we saw in the first chapter, the most generally accepted explanation for them is that they remind the Jews at least three times a day of their divine mission. For Portnoy, however, the dietary laws have lost this meaning completely. They have rather become an observance with negative consequences both in its individual and social effect.

In what concerns the individual, the dietary laws work as a factor that blocks one's personal development. Portnoy says: "What else, I ask you, were all those prohibitive dietary rules and regulations all about to begin with, what else but to give us little Jewish children practice in being repressed?" (PC, p. 75). And he still adds: "[They] remind us three times a day that life is boundaries and restrictions if it's anything" (PC, p. 75). It is obvious that for Portnoy the dietary laws only mean to make passivity and renunciation characteristics of the Jew's personality, perpetuating, in this way, a marked part of the Jewish heritage which is so negative in his view.

To understand the negativity of these teachings which, as Portnoy assumes, comes from the dietary laws, one just has to take into consideration that he lives in the most capitalistic society in the world. Renunciation and passivity are not supposed to be the characteristics of someone who wants to survive in the American system. By having these characteristics developed and

reinforced every day, Jewish children are meant to feel always misplaced and inadaptable to a sheer integration into the "American way of life." This inadequate education is, then, the negative social effect of the dietary laws.

Yet, this is not the only one. Another negative social consequence of the dietary laws pointed out by Portnoy refers to the Jews' relationship with the gentiles. In his view, by keeping this tradition the Jews are more interested in reinforcing their segregation from the gentiles than in religious motives. This viewpoint is illustrated with the passage in which the Portnoy family goes to a Chinese restaurant. There, they break the dietary laws and eat even pork with no guilt feeling. Explaining his family's proceeding, Portnoy says that to the Chinese, they are "just some big-nosed variety of WASP!" (PC, p. 85). This makes them feel at ease to eat whatever they want there whereas in the presence of the WASPs they have to keep their alimentary traditions out of a necessity of showing themselves as superior to them. Unlike the gentiles, the Jews want to demonstrate that they, the Chosen People, eat only those foods allowed in the Torah and not "anything" as Portnoy says, ironizing his parents' prejudice: "They will eat anything, anything they can get their big goy hands on! And the terrifying corollary, they will do anything as well" (PC, p. 77).

With such an ironical statement, Portnoy indeed derides the orthodox Jewish view of the dietary laws. According to this view, man acquires the characteristics of the animals whose meat he eats[17]. That's why, then, he should eat only what is determined

in the Torah. Avoiding the meat of those animals not prescribed he will be free from their "terrifying corollary." Still with irony, Portnoy uses this conception to explain his masturbating on a bus sitting beside a gentile girl: "Now, maybe the lobster is what did it" (PC, p. 75). He is referring to the dinner he had just had with his sister and her boy-friend in which they broke the dietary laws by eating lobster.

This is not the only association between the dietary laws and sexual transgression in Portnoy's Complaint. Another example is Jack Portnoy's presumed love affair with Anne, a gentile colleague of his. As Portnoy understands it, his father's bringing Anne to a typical Jewish meal at their home was his confession of adultery to his family. These associations between the dietary laws and sexual transgressions make clear that the narrator's intention is to ironize the orthodox assumption that the maintenance of the Jews' alimentary habits promotes their spiritual uplift.

Portnoy's approach to the dietary laws has a similarity with his approach to another very significant aspect of the Jewish theology: the doctrine of the Chosen People. As we have seen, the basic assumption of this doctrine is that the Jews were chosen by God to serve him and also perform a universal service to mankind. In Portnoy's view, the acceptance of such a doctrine has acquired the same social connotation of the dietary laws: it has become a barrier which reinforces the segregation between Jews and gentiles. Their religious status of Chosen People makes some Jews assume an arrogant attitude towards the gentiles whom they consider "another breed on human being entirely!" (PC. p. 173).

This is Jack and Sophie's conception and it is also one of the main characteristics of the education they give to their son. Portnoy says about it: "But I am something more, or so they tell me. A Jew" (PC, p. 69).

On account of this high concept of their own people, at the same time that Jewish parents press their children in order to be superior to the gentiles, they also demand that their children keep away from gentile children. This posture reveals an unusual aspect in the Jew-gentile relationship. Instead of the only well-known prejudice from gentiles against Jews, it denounces that there is also a reciprocity from the Jews. Some of them are also prejudiced against the gentiles. In a certain moment, Portnoy states this explicitly:

> We all haven't been lucky enough to have been born Jews, you know. So a little rachmones on the less fortunate, okay? Because I am sick and tired of goyische this and goyische that! If it's bad it's the goyim, if it's good it's the Jews! (PC, p. 71)

Of course, this attitude is partly rooted in the Jewish religious traditions. As we have seen, since biblical times the Jews have had the notion that to get mixed up with the gentiles means a threat to their religious purity and social integrity.

In the case of Portnoy, this segregation works as an element reinforcing his sense of alienation. It makes him feel an intruder within the large American society. Nevertheless, his alienation is not only in relation to gentile society as it should be expected. It is also in relation to the Jewish people with whom he cannot identify completely.

Yet more than alienation in two different communities, this lack of a definite cultural identity provokes in Portnoy a sense of disharmony with life. He expresses this comparing his performance as a baseball center fielder with the way he feels in life. His utmost desire is to feel in life the way he feels when playing baseball. At those moments, he knows every movement he has to make to their smallest detail. He also knows even the "right amount of exasperation" (PC, p. 68) to express when necessary. He says:

> And it's true, is it not? - incredible, but apparently true - there are people who feel in life the ease, the self-assurance, the simple and essential affiliation with what is going on, that I used to feel as the center fielder for the Seabees? Because it wasn't, you see, that one was the best center fielder imaginable, only that one knew exactly, and down to the smallest particular, how a center fielder should conduct himself. And there are people like that walking the streets of the U.S. of A.? I ask you, why can't I be one! Why can't I exist now as I existed for the Seabees out there in center field! Oh, to be a center fielder, a center fielder - and nothing more! (PC, p. 68)

In an attempt to solve this misplacedness of his and conciliate with his people's culture, Portnoy goes to a totally Jewish environment: Israel. But there, he finds out it is not yet the answer he is looking for. Even in a place where he is totally surrounded by other Jews, a place where everybody he sees is Jewish like himself, a place where the Jews are "the WASPs" (PC, p. 231), Portnoy still feels lonely and misplaced. Having an argument with an Israeli girl, he says: "Yes, Naomi, I am soiled, Oh, I am impure and also pretty fucking tired, my dear, of never

being quite good enough for the Chosen People!" (PC, p. 242). In other words, no matter how much and how good he does, Portnoy is always dissatisfied and unhappy with himself. Both among other Jews and among the gentiles, he always feels misplaced. Moreover, his disillusionment in Israel also denotes that his sense of alienation when he is in the USA is rather a direct consequence of his inadequate religious education than of his being a Jew living in a gentile-dominated society.

Due to his religious education, Portnoy has become a peculiar kind of Jew. Tracing a parallel with the stereotype of the Wandering Jew, we can say that he is now a cultural wandering Jew. In spite of having two homelands, the United States, where he was born, and Israel, his religious homeland, he cannot feel culturally adapted to either of them. According to Bernice W. Kliman, Portnoy's incapacity to conciliate his American and Jewish heritages is symbolized in his impotence with Naomi who reminds him of both his mother and his former gentile girl-friend Kay Campbell. Kliman says that "Naomi, in the Bible, is Ruth's mother-in-law and thus a symbol of inter-racial reconciliation."[18]

Together with the dietary laws and the doctrine of the Chosen People, another Jewish value with which Portnoy also disagrees is the principle of retribution. It is life itself that makes him realize the world is not ruled by such a principle. As it was pointed out in the first chapter, this principle is part of Jewish theology. Its basic assertion is that everyone is rewarded or punished by God in accordance with his own deeds.

Having been educated within the Jewish principles, Portnoy naturally assumes that that is the way life works. However, later in life he realizes that there is not such a logical system operating in man's destiny. His awakening to this truth happens when he, already an adult, knows about the way his old childhood friends Mandel and Smolka live now. Meeting the former by chance, Portnoy comes to know that they both, besides succeeding as middle-class professionals, have also married and had children. Indeed, Smolka has become a professor at Princeton. In other words, they have managed to become well-established citizens and apparently happy with the life they lead.

According to the logical way of life Portnoy was taught, this should not be the destiny of these guys. Had the principle of retribution worked in their lives, "they [would] be in jail - or the gutter" or even dead now. This should be their deserved punishment for having not been nice children at all. Unlike Portnoy, they were lazy and would not eat properly. Instead of studying and doing their homeworks, they would cheat off. Mandel would even drink alcohol when he was still a child. On the other hand, Portnoy, who was an obedient and intelligent child and had all necessary material conditions to achieve his objectives, is dissatisfied and uncertain about his own life. In spite of being professionally successful, at the age of thirty-three he behaves as a rebellious child who is still trying to be emotionally independent from his parents. He has never been a happy man.

Thus, Portnoy can see now that when the principle of retribution works in the life of some people it does so merely by chance. It certainly worked with Rita Girardi, the girl who used

to have sexual intercourse with many different boys. She ended up shot at the head for betraying one of her lovers. However, the principle of retribution did not work with Portnoy or with his friends Mandel and Smolka. This shows to Portnoy that if there is any rule governing the world, it is definitely not the principle of retribution as it is taught by his religion.

Although the principle of retribution has been part of the Jewish theology since biblical times, it does not seem to have worked as a way to avoid the Jews' saga of suffering along their history as a people. In a similar way, although leading a life which pleases both his family and his community, Portnoy cannot help facing suffering in his life. Of course, it would be impossible for him to live without undergoing it. However, there is a difference between the suffering experienced by Portnoy's forebears and his own. Whereas for those the main source of suffering were the persecutions and discriminations from the anti-semites, for Portnoy the main source of suffering is in his own home: his relationship with his Jewish parents. Although Portnoy experiences anti-semitism as it is pointed out by Shaked[19], it is something neither constant nor of great importance in his life. It is undeniably Jack and Sophie who are definitely the single greatest source of suffering for Portnoy.

Although having completely different personalities, it is exactly the kind of persons Jack and Sophie are that makes them a burden to Portnoy. Sophie, as we have already seen, is extremely protective and domineering. She watches and tries to control each aspect of her son's life, thus smothering him. Jack, in his turn,

is the complete opposite of his wife, having no self-confidence and determination. In fact he is the embodiment of the archetype of Job, i.e., the Jewish guy who suffers hard without uttering a single word of complaint or making any serious reaction to change his situation. For such a person, all his misfortunes are manifestations of God's will and so they have to be accepted passively. Both in his professional and family life Jack has failed. For all his effort to be one of the best insurance salesmen in his company, working even on Sundays, Jack never gets a promotion. However, he never quits the job to try a better one. In the same way, at home Jack's weakness in relation to Sophie is so evident that Portnoy whishes there could have been an inversion of roles between them: "If my father had only been my mother! and my mother my father! But what a mixed-up of the sexes in our house!" (PC, p. 41). He obviously misses the figure of a strong father who could at least help him face such a possessive mother. What Jack provides, however, is "a poignant model of all his darling son seeks to avoid." [20]

This hard reality of Jack is used by Sophie to reinforce her manipulation over Portnoy. By means both direct and devious, she impresses upon her son the idea that his father leads such a life on account of him. To make matters worse, Jack himself says to Portnoy he is their chance to be "as good as anybody" (PC, p.). The result of this is that Portnoy develops a tremendous guilt feeling which binds him even more to Jack and Sophie. Thus, although hating his mother for her malign dominance and his father for his passivity, Portnoy is unable to break with them once and for all. His guilt feeling has become much stronger than

his hatred.

Although, as it was pointed out above, Portnoy does not face the same kind of suffering his ancestors did, he, like all Jewish children, is taught to keep on mind and carry on their heritage of suffering. We can conclude this from his argument with his father and his subsequent dialogue with Hannah:

> But you are a Jew, my sister says. You are a Jewish boy, more than you know, and all you're doing is making yourself miserable, all you're doing is hollering into the wind... (...)
>
> Do you know, she asks me, where you would be now if you had been born in Europe instead of America?
>
> That isn't the issue, Hannah.
>
> Dead, she says.
>
> That isn't the issue!
>
> Dead. Gassed, or shot, or incinerated, or butchered, or buried alive. Do you know that? And you could have screamed all you wanted that you were not a Jew, that you were a human being and had nothing whatever to do with their stupid suffering heritage, and still you would have been taken away to be disposed of. You would be dead, and I would be dead, and
>
> But that isn't what I'm talking about!
>
> And your mother and your father would be dead.
>
> But why are you taking their side!
>
> I'm not taking anybody's side, she says. I'm only telling you he's not such an ignorant person as you think.
>
> And she isn't either, I suppose! I suppose the Nazis make everything she says and does smart and brilliant too! I suppose the Nazis are an excuse for everything that happens in this house!
>
> Oh, I don't know, says my sister, maybe, maybe they are, and now she begins to cry too, and how monstrous I feel, for she sheds her tears for six million, or so I think, while I shed mine only for myself. Or so I think. (PC, pp. 72-73)

What is implicit here is that the life of any Jew has to be cast by his people's history of suffering and persecution. In this sense, "the 'wisdom' of 'his people' is a burden, reinforcing

[Portnoy's] sense of inadequate experience"[21] rather than a source of cultural identity.

In the only way he finds to relieve his suffering, Portnoy once again reveals the Jewishness rooted in him. It is through humor. According to Moacyr Scliar humor has been the Jews' defense against despair in a world hostile to them[22]. Along his life, Portnoy is always deprecating and making fun of himself. He admits this similarity with his people when in argument with Naomi, the Israeli girl: "Oh, I don't know, (...) self-deprecation is, after all, a classic form of Jewish humor" (PC, p. 241).

This analysis shows that, with **Portnoy's Complaint**, Philip Roth dives into the mind of a nice Jewish boy to reveal what goes on inside there. His intention is obviously to explore the way such a character, who pleases so much his family and community with his social and academic performance, sees and reacts to those forces that have cast him. Its greatest merit consists in showing how a man, who leads an admirable and respectable life in the eyes of the others, can at the same time have a private life which is so conflicting. Although this analysis concentrates only on the religious influences which have operated on Alexander Portnoy's life, in its entirety **Portnoy's Complaint** constitutes a complete dissection of the well-known stereotype of the nice Jewish boy. At the same time, it is also the portrait of a whole generation, as Shaked appropriately defines it: "**Portnoy's Complaint** é o testemunho poderoso do enorme poder que a identidade judaica interiorizada tem na vida da jovem geração que se rebela contra ela. Roth escreveu a elegia do eterno

prisioneiro de sua tribo."[23]

NOTES

[1] Goldman, Albert. "Wild Blue Shocker: Portnoy's Complaint." (Life, February 7, 1969), p. 56-8

[2] Pinsker, Sanford. The Comedy That "Hoits". (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1975), p. 55

[3] Pinsker, p. 56

[4] Shaked, Gershon. Sombras de Identidade. (São Paulo: Associação Universitária de Cultura Judaica, 1988), p. 125

[5] Roth, Philip. Portnoy's Complaint (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 118. From now on this book will be referred to in the text by its initials followed by page numbers.

[6] WASP: English acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

[7] Friedman, Alan Warren. "The Jew's Complaint in Recent American Fiction: Beyond Exodus and Still in the Wilderness." In Critical Essays on Philip Roth, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetss, G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 154

[8] Shaked, p. 12

[9] Shaked, p. 131

[10] Hertzberg, Arthur. The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History - qtd by John Higham in "The Pot that Didn't Melt." (New York Review of Books, XXXVII, 6 (1990), p. 12

[11] Scliar, Moacyr. A Condição Judaica - Das Tábuas da Lei à Mesa da Cozinha (Porto Alegre: L&PM, 1985), p. 57

[12] Epstein, Isidore, Judaísmo (Lisboa - Rio de Janeiro: Editora Ulisséia, 1959), p. 155/8

[13] Zborowski, Mark. Life Is With People qtd by Milton Meltzer in World of Our Fathers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p. 206

[14] Shaked, p. 164

[15] Baumgarten, Murray and Gottfried, Barbara. Understanding Philip Roth. (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 12

[16] Epstein, p. 164

[17] An explanation of the Jewish orthodox interpretation of the dietary laws can be found in Yaacov Israel Blumenfeld's **Judaísmo: Visão do Universo - A Vida, O Mundo e O Homem Segundo A Torah**. (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 1989), pp. 33, 37, 52.

[18] Kliman, Bernice W. "Names in **Portnoy's Complaint**". (Critique, nr 14, 3, 1973), p. 23

[19] Shaked, p. 131

[20] Pinsker, p. 61

[21] Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "About Portnoy." (**The Yale Review**, 58, 1969), p. 624/5

[22] Scliar, p. 44, 79

[23] Shaked, p. 135

FOURTH CHAPTER

THE GHOST WRITER

Published in 1979, Philip Roth's **The Ghost Writer** is pointed out by some critics like John Leonard[1] and Joseph C. Voelker[2] as a novel with underlying autobiographical elements. It is narrated in the manner of the memoirs of a writer, Nathan Zuckerman, who remembers his fascinations and plights as a beginning writer twenty years before. At that time, as a twenty-three-year-old youth, Nathan was greatly fascinated with the veteran writer Emanuel Isidore Lonoff and his works of fiction. In fact, he starts his recollections with his visit to Lonoff, an event to which he attributes a great significance in his writing career. On the other hand, the most serious plight Nathan had to face, then, was confined to his family circle. To be more precise, it was related to their religion, Judaism, and the way he approached it in his own fiction.

Yet, religion was not always a matter of disagreement between Nathan and his family. Although defining himself "as an orthodox college atheist" when he comes to study in Chicago, in his childhood and adolescence Nathan was very enthusiastic about his religion. Much of his enthusiasm, however, was just the product of the environment in which he was raised. Nathan's parents and relatives were religious people, constantly discussing Jewish matters which he not only shared but also defended, sometime later at school, whenever he was called upon

to debate an intricate issue involving Judaism. Together with his family, there was his neighborhood, a Jewish section in Newark, which also had some influence on Nathan's early religious life. Besides, most of his school friends were also Jewish. Thus, having been brought up surrounded by people he loved and enjoying the life he led, Nathan could hardly have had a different attitude towards his elders' religious views.

To such an atmosphere where, at least in terms of religion, harmony and understanding prevailed, Nathan also contributed with his share. He adequately played the role of the "nice Jewish boy" to his family. As Roth suggests in his articles "'How Did You Come to Write That Book, Anyway?'"[3] and "Some New Jewish Stereotypes,"[4] the "nice Jewish boy" is the Jewish son who lives up to all his parents' expectations, especially in what concerns his performance in social and academic life. Among others, then, the nice Jewish boy's attributes should be politeness, respectability and a brilliant intelligence. Both Dr. Zuckerman, Nathan's father, and he himself recognize that, at least while living with his parents, he fitted in exactly with what was expected of him. Over their argument about Nathan's short story "Higher Education," when he is already an adult, Dr. Zuckerman says to his son: "You are a loving boy. I watched you like a hawk all day. I've watched you all your life. You are a good and kind and considerate young man"[5]. About his own academic life, says Nathan: "At a good local high school and an excellent college I had performed as generations of my forebears had expected me to" (TGW, p. 6).

Neither Roth's articles nor his fiction define the religious expectations of Jewish parents for their nice Jewish boy. Figuring them out, however, is not a hard task. The nice Jewish boy is expected to keep some attachment to his people's religion what does not necessarily mean to be a pious zealot. Thus, his foregoing religiousness is another of Nathan's attributes making him a source of pride and happiness for his parents. Had he kept all that religious enthusiasm as he grew up, Nathan would still be seen as a perfect son in his adulthood. Nonetheless, his religiousness undergoes a change as time goes by. As we have pointed out above, Nathan's concern with the religious side of his life was a mere consequence of his family and acquaintances' influence, thus being subject to shifts as his character developed. Indeed, as he grew up, it gradually faded away, leaving room for atheistic ideas. By the time he leaves for Chicago, he says about his enthusiasm for Judaism: "(...) my passion had been pretty well spent and I was as ready as an adolescent could be to fall headlong for Robert Hutchins' Humanities One" (TGW, p. 12).

Unlike Alexander Portnoy, his counterpart in **Portnoy's Complaint**, disowning his parents' religious values is not a traumatic process to Nathan. It is a change which takes place smoothly as he grows mature and realizes how meaningless his early convictions were. Abandoning his old religiousness causes him no spiritual or emotional uneasiness at all. Nonetheless, the smoothness of such a process can't help bringing about a conflict between him and his father. It begins on account of the short story, "Higher Education," written by Nathan and to be published

in a national magazine. Dr. Zuckerman is infuriated by his son's retelling of a family dispute, depicting its protagonists in a way that, in the physician's view, will only foster Anti-Semitism.

Dr. Zuckerman's argument to make his son change his mind about the short story evinces how large the gap separating them both has become. In his dichotomic and ghetto-minded view of the world, things are "either good-for-the-Jews or no-good-for-the-Jews." Thus, it is unacceptable for him that Nathan presents in his piece of fiction a depiction of Jews with bad traits in their personality. This is a no-good-thing for the Jews because it will please the anti-Semites, fostering their hatred for Jews. For Dr. Zuckerman, what Nathan should have emphasized in his Jewish characters were characteristics such as kindness and loving and hard-working which Meema Chaya, a great-aunt of Nathan's who inspired one of his fictional characters, bore during her lifetime.

Dr. Zuckerman's view is the same which Roth identifies in a New York rabbi who raised some accusations against him on account of the way he depicts his fictional Jewish characters. In his article "Writing About Jews,"[6] Roth says that the prevailing idea in the mind of that rabbi and his likes is that

> "There is nothing in our lives we need to tell the Gentiles about, unless it has to do with how well we manage. Beyond that, it's none of their business. We are important to no one but ourselves, which is as it should be (or better be) anyway."

In prevailing on Nathan to accept this standpoint as the best for Jews, Dr. Zuckerman acts not only as a tyrannical bigot, but also as an overprotective father prompted by the sincere desire to protect his son. In his view, Nathan is oblivious of the real dimension of the outside world's hostility against Jews due to the way he was brought up.

Yet, the truth is that, although still a very young man, Nathan has already steadfast ideas about his people's reality. That accounts for his posture of security in face of both his father's reproaches and Judge Wapter's letter and questionnaire he receives some weeks after his argument with Dr. Zuckerman. In its ten-question questionnaire, Judge Wapter, in a manner, lines up Nathan with famous anti-Semites, among other charges, still on account of his short story. In his indignation against the content and the insinuations of the questionnaire, Nathan refuses to answer it. It is only over a telephone conversation with his mother that he states what could be taken as his defense. When Mrs. Zuckerman refers to the holocaust of European Jews, which also seems to be the strongest reason motivating Dr. Zuckerman's and Judge Wapter's apprehensive attitude towards his short story, Nathan says:

> In Europe - not in Newark! We are not the wretched of Belsen! We were not the victims of that crime! (TGW, p. 106)

For Nathan, the happenings in Nazi Germany should not be generalized. In his view, the reality of the Newark Jews, and by extension that of all American Jews, is quite different from that

faced by other Jews, specifically those who were in Europe during World War II. Obviously, his view on this matter and the predicament his fictionalizing it brings to him are a reflection of Roth's own reality. In his already mentioned article "Writing About Jews," Roth says in answer to charges of writing anti-Semitic fiction:

> If the barrier between prejudice and persecution collapsed in Germany, this is hardly reason to contend that no such barrier exists in our country. And if it should ever begin to appear to be crumbling, then we must do what is necessary to strengthen it. But not by putting on a good face; not by refusing to admit to the intricacies and impossibilities of Jewish lives; not by pretending that Jews have existences less in need of, and less deserving of, honest attention than the lives of their neighbors; not by making Jews invisible.[7]

Making Jews invisible is exactly what Nathan does not do in his fiction. Following this procedure would mean to accept that the world Jewry should be a kind of everlasting prisoner of those events in Nazi Germany and that from now on Jew-Gentile relationship should be always modeled on them.

This conflict between Nathan and his community makes clear that in The Ghost Writer there are two distinctive groups of Jews which are distinguished by the way they interpret their own reality in the USA. In the first group, there is Nathan for whom, again expressing Roth's view, American Jews live in a "time and place, where neither defamation nor persecution are what they were elsewhere in the past."[8] In his opinion, the only physical violence and consequent bloodshed American Jews suffer comes from themselves when Jewish girls have their nose fixed so as to

disguise their cultural identity. However, as we shall see, this is not the only kind of violence from Jew against Jew in the USA.

In the second group, there are Dr. Zuckerman and Judge Wapter for whom what matters most is the whole history of the Jewish people, not only of the American ones. Bearing in mind all the persecution and discrimination undergone by their people for almost two thousand years, these Jews have developed an eagerness to pass out an unspotted image of themselves to the Gentiles so as not to give them any reason for anti-Semitic attitudes. Their points of view are carried out by Jewish institutions which have as their main objective to protect the Jews against anti-Semitic defamation. Besides active anti-Semites, in their severe zeal these Jewish institutions sometimes wind up also attacking members of their own community who are considered wayward. In so doing, they create a kind of ideological police to which Nathan becomes a victim when he has his short story condemned. In the context of The Ghost Writer, it is specifically Judge Wapter who stands for these Jewish institutions. According to Joseph C. Voelker, his "sly chauvinism and manipulative rhetoric characterize the attacks upon Roth that have been launched from Jewish Community Center lecture halls over the last twenty years"[9]. In fact, Judge Wapter is one of those who, like the New York rabbi in Roth's article, "remain a victim in a country where he does not have to live like one if he chooses"[10].

An indication of Judge Wapter's disposition to remain a victim is given by the letter he sends to Nathan. In its P.S., he asks Nathan whether he has already seen the Broadway production of The Diary of Anne Frank and, if not, he advises him to do so.

His obvious intention is to show Nathan the kind of literature he is expected to produce. In the Judge's view, **The Diary of Anne Frank** offers a depiction of Jews which should be taken as a standard to be followed by Jewish writers. That is, a depiction that arouses pity and makes people shed tears for its protagonists. The implict objective of Judge Wapter is pointed out by Sanford Pinsker when he says that the Judge's "series of questions [are] designed to domesticate the satirist in Zuckerman and to turn Zuckerman, the literary artist, into Zuckerman, the Jewish community's Public Relations man."[11]

It is still in his telephone conversation with Mrs. Zuckerman that Nathan expresses his opinion on this matter. Answering his mother's question abouth his having enjoyed or not the foregone book, Nathan says:

> — That's not the issue. How can you dislike it? Mother, I will not prate in platitude to please the adults! (TGW, p. 107)

For him, nobody can possibly dislike **The Diary of Anne Frank** especially if he is aware of the historical situation in which it was written. The life story of its author/protagonist inevitably touches its readers. Afterwards, in a conversation with Amy Bellette, Lonoff's former writing student, Nathan confesses to having enjoyed the book for its literary qualities, the techniques used by its author.

This letter Nathan receives from Judge Wapter together with his previous argument with Dr. Zuckerman leave no doubt as to what they consider good Jewish writing. For them, Jews should be

depicted in fiction as a nice and endearing and hard-working people, living and loving each other in their harmonious world that is only disturbed when anti-Semites interfere in it. In their view, this is the only way to avoid anti-Semitism. In Nathan's, it only means to "prate in platitude to please the adults!"

Talking about this kind of literature which is produced by some of his contemporary American Jewish writers, Roth says it passes the idea

> that the Jews are not poor innocent victims after all - all the time they were supposed to be being persecuted, they were having a good time being warm to one another and having their wonderful family lives. What they were developing (...) was their "lovely Jewish slant on the world"[12].

So, in Roth's view, instead of helping to abolish anti-Semitism, this kind of literature can in fact furnish fuel to it. Passing to Gentiles the image that the Jews have lived in their particular world which comes to be an enviable place, completely different from the outside world, it only appeases the mind of those who, "if they have not been practicing anti-Semites, have at any rate been visited with distrustful, suspicious feeling about Jews, feeling which they are told ought not to have"[13].

Indeed, what this kind of literature tries to produce is a positive Jewish stereotype in order to destroy the negative ones supported for so long by anti-Semites. It is a literature which is obviously the result of the pressures from people like Dr. Zuckerman and Judge Wapter and those institutions they stand for

here. Nathan, however, stands fast against these pressures and rejects to be a mere reproducer of stereotypes in his fiction. His rejection is more clearly expressed in his reconstitution of Anne Frank. Inspired by Amy Bellette, his Anne Frank has a life story a bit different from that of the Jewish Dutch girl. After escaping death at the concentration camps, she lives for a time with European families until she decides to leave for the U.S.A. There, becoming aware of the notoriety that her now published Diary has achieved, she makes the decision, after many reflections, that the best to do is not to reveal her real fate to the world.

The decisions made by Nathan's Anne Frank unveil characteristics in her personality which for sure would frustrate the majority of her readers and spectators as well. Instead of a girl whom everyone should feel sorry for, she is depicted as someone ambitious, clever, confident, astute, and combative. She already demonstrates these characteristics when still in Europe, living with foster parents, soon after the end of World War II:

> She told whoever asked that she had been evacuated from Holland with a group of Jewish schoolchildren the week before the Nazis invaded. Sometimes she did not even say that the schoolchildren were Jewish, an omission for which she was mildly rebuked by the Jewish families who had accepted responsibility for her and were troubled by her lying. But she could not bear them all laying their helpful hands upon her shoulders because of Auschwitz and Belsen. If she was going to be thought exceptional, it would not be because of Auschwitz and Belsen but because of what she had made of herself since (FGW, p. 132).

Attributing such characteristics to Anne Frank, Nathan is in fact

trying to free her from the prototype of Job, i.e., the passive Jewish sufferer, in which she was framed.

Certainly, this lack of a serious commitment to Judaism would be her characteristic to infuriate the most Judge Wapter and his likes in Nathan's Anne Frank. Picking some passages from her Diary, Nathan shows how, ever since she was still hidden with her family, she refused to assume the role of a Jewish martyr. In her view, neither she nor her parents were "representative of religious or observant Jews" (TGW, p. 142). Except for lighting the candles on Friday nights, the only other Jewish tradition they observed was the celebration of the Chanukas once a year. In fact, the only one who was deeply concerned about religion in Anne's family was her sister Margot. For Anne, all that she and her family are coming through does not make any sense at all since being Jewish is not their greatest concern. She says about her expectations for the future: "(...) my first wish after the war is that I may become Dutch! I love the Dutch, I love this country, I love the language and want to work here" (TGW, p. 143). Unlike Margot whose wish is to be a midwife in Palestine, Anne wants to learn English in London, to look at clothes and study arts in Paris, to interview movie stars in Hollywood. The deities she says to adore are those she has studied in Greek and Roman mythology, not the God of the Jewish patriarch. In the night, to appease her fears, she reads Goethe and Dickens rather than the Bible.

When already in the USA, Nathan's Anne Frank faces a dilemma which bears a resemblance with Nathan's. Reading in a magazine that her father was still alive, Anne, after some hesitation and

meditation, realizes that the best to do is to remain publicly dead. This decision is reached when she sees how damaged her work would be if she were found out to be alive. Her book would lose its strength and power to become just "a young teenager's diary of her trying years in hiding during the German occupation of Holland, something boys and girls could read in bed at night along with the adventures of the Swiss Family Robinson" (TGW, p. 145). In the same way, Nathan knows that if he succumbs to his father's and Judge Wapter's pressures to reconcile with them, his literary work will mean nothing else than "pratCing] in platitude."

A dilemma similar to Nathan's and his Anne Frank's is also faced by Dr. Hugh, the protagonist in Henry James' short story **The Middle Years** which Nathan reads in Lonoff's study. Dr. Hugh, a young physician, neglects his patient, a rich countess, for Dencombe, a novelist whose art fascinates him. As a consequence, he is disinherited by the countess when she dies. Although aware of the real significance of his loss, Dr. Hugh does not regret his attitude. His love for the literary art does not leave room for regret from the decision taken.

A commom element underlying the attitude of these three characters is their love for art which demands from them a kind of sacrifice. Out of love for her book, Anne Frank decides not to reveal her present situation, thus staying away from her so beloved father. As a consequence of his infatuation and his passionate idolatry for Dencombe, Dr. Hugh misses the opportunity to become rich by inheriting the countess' fortune. In the same

way, Nathan knows that, keeping on the road chosen by him now, he will never be in good terms with his father again.

Of course, Nathan's reconstitution of Anna Frank is not published. It only happens in his mind. But even if it were made into a written piece it would only reinforce Dr. Zuckerman's and Judge Wapter's opinion about Nathan. They belong to that group of people whom Roth says are unable to see in fiction its "'something more' - all that is beyond simple moral categorizing"[14]. For them, Nathan would still continue to be a traitor of the Jewish people no matter how well-meaning he was in his writing.

Deep inside, Nathan is sure of not betraying his people. He knows he is upholding the responsibilities placed on him by the Judge in his letter. Like him and Dr. Zuckerman, Nathan is also proud of being a Jew. What distinguishes these two parties is only the way they approach their own reality. This fact is not totally unknown to the Judge. To some extent, he understands quite well the situation in which Nathan stands when he compares him to great artists of mankind like Socrates and Henrik Ibsen "who were persecuted by the frightened and ill-educated who do not understand that the artist is a special individual with a unique contribution to make to mankind" (TGW, p. 101). In spite of this, it is exactly with the bigot that Judge Wapter sides when the situation involves his own beliefs.

For all his good intention and the coherent explanation presented by Judge Wapter in his letter, which Dr. Zuckerman also comes to read, the truth remains that Nathan's persistence in his viewpoints will never allow him to be in good terms with his

father again. In this turning moment of his life, Dr. Zuckerman stands for everything he is willing to put aside. Their breaking up amounts to Nathan's desire to live in accordance with a new consciousness.

Yet, acquiring a new consciousness does not mean to be totally independent. Nathan still needs the figure of a spiritual father to support and guide him in the way he wants to follow. He tries, then, to find this paternal figure in Felix Abravanel whose writing he admires so much. To his disappointment, when Nathan meets the famous writer, he finds out that Abravanel is like "a radio tower with its tiny red light burning high up to warn off low-flying aircraft" (TGW, p. 59). Engrossed in his own fame and popularity, "Felix Abravanel was clearly not in the market for a twenty-three-year-old son" (TGW, p. 66).

It is in the secluded and anti-social writer Emanuel Isidore Lonoff that Nathan finds the moral support he is looking for. More than his writing style which he wants to catch, Lonoff's way of living becomes the model Nathan wishes to follow. A reciprocity of feeling helps him in his relationship with Lonoff. Out of all the requests through telephone calls and letters Lonoff receives from young writers every day, Nathan is the only one he accepts to receive for a conversation. Besides, after Nathan's analysis of the literature chain formed by Isaac Babel, Felix Abravanel and Lonoff himself, the latter points out that Nathan is the next link to that chain. He becomes the son chosen to give continuity to Lonoff's art.

Over his argument with his wife Hope during dinnertime,

Lonoff says a sentence that very adequately defines himself both in his writing style and way of living. He says: "I have my own kind of bravery" (TGW, p. 33). Although pronounced in the middle of a quarrel, Nathan feels this sentence is very significant and keeps it on his mind. It is an indication that the strongest characteristic in Lonoff's personality is his individuality which has made him stand firm against any pressure both in his personal and professional life.

This strong individuality is what has made Lonoff lead his life in a way that he becomes, in Nathan's view, "the Jew who got away." Throughout his life, Lonoff has always avoided adjusting to any kind of stereotype, either to those offered by the American system or by the Jewish traditions. Talking about Felix Abravanel, he says he admires the way he leads his life: "Beautiful wives, beautiful mistresses, alimony the size of the national debt, polar expeditions, war-front reportage, famous friends, famous enemies, breakdowns, public lectures, five-hundred-page novel every third years, and still (...) time and energy left over for all that self-absorption (TGW, p. 53). In short, Abravanel plays the role of the successful American man exactly as he is expected to. Lonoff, in a directly opposite behavior, has always kept away from social life because he could not tolerate adapting to the stereotype demanded by it. Talking about his short stay in New York some years before, Lonoff says: "I was there for three months and I got a word. What word I don't remember, but suddenly I belonged to a faction" (TGW, p. 50).

Like in his social life, Lonoff has also kept a similar detachment from Jewishness, although his life story resembles

that of the Wandering Jew, one of the most known Jewish stereotypes. Still in his childhood, his family had to flee from Russia on account of religious persecution. In Palestine, the place where they found refuge, his parents died of typhus. After their death, he stays for a time with some friends of his family in a farming settlement until being shipped to relatives in Brookline. He lived for a short time with his American relatives and then became a vagabond until he married Hope at the age of twenty.

Although keeping away from Jews, "a story by [Lonoff] without a Jew in it is unthinkable" (TGW, p. 51). Asked by Nathan about these contradictory facts, Lonoff says: "It proves why the young rabbi in Pittsfield can't live with the idea that I wont be 'active'." His answer is not very revealing. Perhaps the best definition of Lonoff's Judaism is the one offered by Gershon Shaked in his book **Sombras de Identidade**. Shaked says there is a conception, although not well-expressed but very common among American Jewish writers, according to which

> o judaísmo não é uma fé religiosa, mas um grupo étnico com seu próprio modo de vida e de pensamento. Este modo de vida não é manifesto por algum sinal externo mas na relação dos heróis com seu ambiente. Ser judeu não tem sentido genético ou religioso. É a admiração por uma espécie de ascetismo, a negação do "modo de vida americano." O ideal não é "fazer sucesso" mas sobreviver moralmente aos desafios do darwinismo social[15].

This is certainly the way Lonoff also sees Judaism and reproduces it in his own fiction.

This release from stereotypes is what Nathan finds in

Lonoff's fiction that fascinates him most. Describing his encounter with this kind of fiction, Nathan says that "the pride inspired in [his] parents by the establishment in 1948 of a homeland in Palestine that would gather in the unmurdered remant of European Jewry was, in fact, not so unlike what welled up in [him] when [he] first came upon Lonoff's thwarted, secretive, imprisoned soul (...)" (TGW, p. 12). A brief investigation of the real meaning of the foundation of the State of Israel to the Jews will help us to understand Nathan's identification with Lonoff's fiction. After almost two thousand years of Diaspora, always moving from one country to another on account of persecution and discrimination, the Jews are at last allowed to come back to the land where they began their history as a people and as a nation. As a complete Jewish environment, this would be a place where they could live without fear of any kind of persecution on account of their religion and race. Culturally, this would also mean a place where persecution against them would no longer exist. The Jews would be free of the burden of stereotypes that was put on them during so many years of wandering. So, the same feeling Nathan's parents had when they knew there was a place where they would no more be considered intruders, he finds when reading Lonoff's stories. Nonetheless, his attempt in expressing it in his own fiction is misunderstood by his parents, bringing about their conflict.

It is evident, then, that after his encounter with Lonoff's fiction, Nathan reencounters his own Jewishness. But, being a Jew acquires a new significance for him now. It becomes much more

than the "childhood Hebrew lessons, or mother's kitchen, or the discussions [he] used to hear among [his] parents and (...) relatives" (TGW, p. 12). It also means more than those stereotypes which are the part of the "burden of exclusion and confinement that still weighed upon the lives of those who had raised [him]" (TGW, p. 12). For him, being a Jew now has become the privilege of sharing a peculiar experience that no other people have ever undergone. Talking about an essay he wrote at college on Lonoff's works, he says:

> (...) I "analyzed" Lonoff's style but kept to myself an explanation of the feeling of kinship that his stories had revived in me for our own largely Americanized clan, moneyless immigrant shopkeepers to begin with, who'd carried on a shtetl life ten minutes' walk from the pillared banks and gargoyled insurance cathedrals of downtown Newark; and what is more, feelings of kinship for our pious, unknown ancestors, whose Galician tribulations had been only a little less foreign to me, while growing up securely in New Jersey, than Abraham's in the Land of Canaan (TGW, p. 13).

Thus, this is the deep effect that Lonoff's treatment of Jewishness in fiction has upon Nathan. Something that neither rituals nor observances and traditions had managed to achieve.

Although finding this new religiousness which suits his way of thinking and also a spiritual father who can guide him in his new road, Nathan still fosters the desire of reconciling with his real father. Prompted by this desire, he daydreams of marrying Amy Bellette who, in his mind, is the real Anne Frank. This would be an unchallengeable answer to all the accusations made against him. At the same time that their marriage would appease his

father's and his community's anger at him, she would also provide him with the necessary freedom to continue his literary work without running the risk of being charged of anti-Semitism again. Someone married to Anne Frank could never be accused of such a crime.

Of course, this dream will never come true. Besides not being in love with Nathan, Amy Bellette is not Anne Frank. The real Anne Frank is really dead. Indeed, Nathan's Anne Franks is just a representation of a desire he pursues but knows he will never achieve. She represents his desire to keep his viewpoints and at the same time live in good terms with his folks. In the face of the impossibility of conciliating these two desires, he inevitably will have to make a choice sooner or later.

Regarding religion, it seems evident that when Roth set out to write **The Ghost Writer**, he had in mind to put into fiction much of his personal experience as an American Jewish writer. Nathan's predicament is obviously the fictionalizing of Roth's own reality especially in the very beginning of his writing career. A biographical approach to this novel would certainly point out many similarities between the author's and the fictional character's life. In fact, more than just fictionalizing some events of his own life, with **The Ghost Writer** Roth attempts to answer the accusations raised against him on account of his previous novels. But, more significant than that, this novel is a reaffirmation of Roth's Jewishness and his pride of being a Jew, although in a different way from that demanded by the American Jewish establishment.

NOTES

[1] Leonard, John. "Fathers and Ghosts." in **Critical Essays on Philip Roth**, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 83

[2] Voelker, Joseph C. "Dedalian Shades: Philip Roth's **The Ghost Writer**." In **Critical Essays on Philip Roth**, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachussets: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 91

[3] Roth, Philip. **Reading Myself and Others**. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 33-4i

[4] Roth, pp. 137-147

[5] Roth, Philip. **The Ghost Writer**. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 95. From now on, this book will be referred to in the text by its initials followed by page numbers.

[6] Roth, p. 166

[7] Roth, p. 103/4

[8] Roth, p. 165

[9] Voelker, p. 91

[10] Roth, p. 165

[11] Pinsker, Sanford (ed.) **Critical Essays on Philip Roth** (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 3

[12] Roth, p. 143

[13] Roth, p. 144

[14] Roth, p. 151

[15] Shaked, Gershon. **Sombras de Identidade** (São Paulo: Associação Universitária de Cultura Judaica, 1988), p. 93

CONCLUSION CHAPTER

The analysis of these three novels by Philip Roth demonstrates that the charges of self-hatred and anti-Semitism that he has received from the American Jewish establishment on account of the way he deals with Jewishness in his fictional works is merely the product of a misreading of his approach to religion. In this way, these three same novels obviously comprise some of the characteristics of Roth's writing which have so much infuriated American Jewish leaders. Before pointing out Roth's real view of religion which this analysis has revealed and in order to understand it better, it is worth taking a glance at some of the elements in these novels that are so unpleasant in the eyes of some members of the American Jewry.

Being very zealous about the image of the Jews to the gentile world, the Jewish leaders cannot really appreciate the way Roth's characters relate to their Jewishness. For people like the Patimkins, for instance, religion works as a kind of social entertainment. Religious services have become an opportunity for ostentation. Other characters, like the Portnoy couple and Rabbi Binder, are unable to see the world beyond their things-are-either-good-or-no-good-for-the-Jews dichotomic view. When displaying what goes on in the mind of some of his Jewish characters, perhaps Roth's audacity which has preoccupied Jewish leaders the most is to reveal how much prejudiced some Jews can be against the gentiles, an attitude which becomes quite significant in the view of what is usually taken for granted in

terms of Jew-gentile relationship. For these prejudiced Jews, any kind of involvement with the non-Jewish is bad for them. This attitude is obviously supported by a sense of considering themselves a superior breed as Sophie Portnoy leaves it implicit in her warnings to her son about gentile girls.

Unable to read the "something more" - to use Roth's own words[1] - that a literary work comprises, the American Jewish leaders can only see these superficial and blatant elements in Roth's works. Their obvious conclusion, then, is that Roth is passing a negative image of the Jewish people to the gentiles and, in this way, fostering anti-Semitism. Creating an image of the Jews as perfect a people as possible is what these leaders seem to expect from Jewish Writers. However, Roth's approach to Jewishness is characterized by "an almost agressive frankness about Jewish experience. (...) He deals with his situations and characters in the real, right way - without piety or apology or vindictiveness (...)."[2]

What is certainly hidden behind the expectation of these Jewish leaders is an apprehension that a depiction of Jews with possible bad traits in their personality might provoke a renewal of the persecutions and discriminations the Jews have undergone troughout their history and which culminated in the contemporary events that took place in Nazi Germany. As we have seen, Roth does not agree with this way of thinking, and it is precisely referring to the Holocaust that, in his fiction, he expresses his standpoint in relation to this common past of suffering that all Jews inherit from their forebears. Pondering over an argument he

is having with his sister Hannah, Alexander Portnoy asserts: "I suppose the Nazis are an excuse for everything that happens in this house!" (PC, p. 73). Echoeing his words, Nathan Zuckerman says to his mother about the Holocaust: "In Europe - not in Newark! We are not the wretched of Belsen! We are not the victims of that crime!" (TGW, p. 106). In the same way, Sergeant Marx does not accept Grossbart's argument that the Jews at Camp Crowder should be together under the allegation that they have to avoid the repetition of what happened in Germany.

Obviously, Roth does not mean that the Jews should now forget their past since it is over. His reaction, in fact, is against an overgeneralization of those past events as a determining factor in the Jew-gentile relationship, especially within the American reality. Roth emphasizes the fact that the American Jews should be aware that their experience has been quite different from that of other Jews. With respect to this problem, he says that "the success of the struggle against the defamation of Jewish character in this country has itself made more pressing the need for a Jewish self-consciousness that is relevant to this time and place, where neither defamation nor persecution are what they were elsewhere in the past."[3]

If this conscience was not yet achieved by these foregone characters who, in actuality, are representations of bigoted religious stereotypes, the same cannot be said about Roth's protagonists. Usually open-minded, educated, third-generation American Jews, these characters are aware of their new reality and, in their attempt to live in accordance with it, they inevitably get in conflict with their elders who are the

embodiment of Judaism itself in their lives. For his insistence in rationalizing some religious matters, Ozzie Freedman is slapped on the face by both his mother and Rabbi Binder. Unable to set himself entirely free from his parents' influence, Portnoy, spends his whole life struggling against them to gain some independence that will allow him to achieve an emotional maturity. After a whole childhood and adolescence of friendship with his father, Nathan Zuckerman has to break up with him on account of the former's disagreement with Nathan's approach to Jewishness in his fiction.

Adopting an interpretation of their reality which is not as strict as their parents', these characters assume religion as a secondary aspect in their life. They are aware that being born a Jew is a contingency rather than a choice of theirs. This idea, as we have already seen, is well summed up by Neil Klugman's assertion: "I am just Jewish" (GC, p. 70). Undoubtedly, Roth's protagonists relation to Judaism is an expression of his own posture in relation to his religion. In 1964, speaking at the annual American-Israel dialogue at the Weizman Institute, he made clear his relation to Judaism when he said: "I am not a Jewish writer. I am a writer who is a Jew."

In face of such an assertion, one is inevitably led to inquire why, as we have seen, Jewishness permeates Roth's fiction so markedly since he wants to keep this detachment from it. Two reasons can be raised to answer it. The first is presented by Baumgarten and Gottfried when they say that Roth's "work is part of an American tradition of 'fictionalized recall;' that is, [he]

does not, despite what some readers believe, write autobiographical novels, though he draws upon personal knowledge which he transforms into fiction."[4] An assertion by Roth himself confirms this foregoing analysis of his works. Talking about his own writing career, he says it has consisted in "undermining experience, embelishing experience, rearranging and enlarging experience into a species of mythology."[5] A still more clarifying statement of Roth about his use of Jews and Jewishness in his fiction can be found in his article "Writing About Jews," where he says in defense of his short story "Defender of the Faith": "Yet, though the moral complexities are not exclusively a Jew's, I never for a moment considered that the character in the story should be anything other than Jews. Someone else might have written a story embodying the same themes, and similar events perhaps, and had at its center Negroes or Irishmen; for me there was no choice."[6] Thus, it is ineluctable for Roth to approach Jewishness in his works. After all, this is his real experience as a human being.

Secondly, by using so constantly the Jewish theme in his fiction, Roth's real intention goes much beyond the mere treatment of the theme of Jew vs Jewishness or Jews vs a gentile-dominated society/world. His real intention in this aspect is, through the use of the material available at his hand, i.e., his Jewish experience, to explore the human possibilities when these involve religion. In so doing, by dealing with Jews and Judaism Roth is, in fact, coming from the particular to the universal. Some characteristics of his approach to religion add up to this universalization of the theme of religion.

To begin with, his protagonists do not accept passively the religious values which are part of their Jewish heritage. Although not always successful, their attitude is that of the "modern man," i.e., they try to analyze, understand and accept their forebears' values in the light of their actual experience.[7] In this way, something like the Jewish conviction of the Chosen People has to be evaluated by these protagonists who are aware that they are also citizens of a country whose Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal. Ozzie Freedman is the only character who approaches this contradiction directly. Nevertheless, it also underlies the conflict lived by other characters like Sergeant Nathan Marx, Eli Peck and Alexander Portnoy.

Assuming a critical view of religious values, it is obvious that organized religion earns a negative connotation in Roth's fiction. For demanding an uncritical acceptance of its values, religion is seen as a hindering element in an individual's development toward a complete maturity. In this sense, Theodore Solotaroff very appropriately defines "the synagogue [as] another version of the dismal constraints and clutchiness of home."[8] Although talking specifically about **Portnoy's Complaint**, Solotaroff's assertion can be well applied to all of Roth's works once its protagonists' parents are the embodiment of Judaism and its values in their life. This accounts for the always conflicting parent-children relationship in Roth. At the same time that children are seeking for a broader view of their reality, their parents push them in the other direction by trying

to keep them attached to their traditional values. Feeling beaten in this fight, Alexander Portnoy sadly asserts at the age of thirty-three that "a Jewish man with parents alive is a fifteen-year-old boy, and will remain a fifteen-year-old boy till they die!" (PC, p. 103). Misunderstood and attacked by his father on account of the way he deals with Jewishness in his fiction, Nathan Zuckerman has to go out in search for a spiritual father who can provide him the support he needs. Baumgarten and Gottfried sum up this situation very well when they say that for Roth's characters' "individuality and integrity are at stake, so parents and inherited loyalties must be confronted, renewed, or sometimes sacrificed."[9]

Nevertheless, this detachment from formal religion does not imply that Roth's characters are totally unreligious. The presentation of these novels in their chronological sequence of publication reveals that, since his first book, Roth's protagonists seem to be, either consciously or unconsciously, involved in a search for a broader kind of religiousness which they cannot find in their parents' formal religion with its hindering values and beliefs that sort out people. This is evident in Neil Klugman's praying in St. Patrick's Cathedral; in Ozzie Freedman's revolts against Rabbi Binder's negation of the plausibility of some Christian beliefs which are interwoven with Jewish ones; in Sergeant Marx's deep respect for other people's religiousness although since long no more a practicing Jew and also in his respect for his gentile subordinates; in Portnoy's demand that his parents take pity on the gentiles since "we all haven't been lucky enough to have been born Jews (.:.)" (PC, p.

71). But it is Nathan Zuckerman in **The Ghost Writer** who manages to achieve this religiousness in its plenitude. At the same time that he reencounters his religious feelings through Lonoff's fiction, he gets rid of that view he used to share with his folks according to which the world is divided between Jews and gentiles. His new religiousness transcends the limits of this prejudiced division. Paradoxically, although keeping no commitment to his people's values and formal religion, Nathan becomes more than ever proud of being a Jew. His Jewish identity acquires a new meaning quite different from that of his parents'.

Another important element revealed by the chronological analysis of these books of Roth is that there is also an evolution in the way his protagonists deal with the influence of religion in their life. So, in the first book, **Goodbye, Columbus**, Eli Peck is the character who is most influenced by religion. He tries to conciliate his Jewish background with his American one, but he does not succeed and, as a consequence of his useless effort, he ends up being taken to a mental hospital on account of a nervous breakdown. In the same way, it is obvious that Alexander Portnoy, the protagonists in **Portnoy's Complaint**, is extremely influenced by religion. He spends his whole life trying to get rid of this influence, but he does not succeed. Like Eli Peck, he ends up telling his life story to a psychiatrist, Dr. Spievogel, in an attempt to understand himself and solve his inner conflicts. However, in **The Ghost Writer**, Nathan Zuckerman has quite a different experience. Although he used to be very enthusiastic about his religion when he was an adolescent, as he

grows up and realizes how meaningless most of his religious beliefs are, he gradually puts them aside. But, unlike Eli Peck and Alexander Portnoy, abandoning his religion is not a traumatic process for Nathan. Quite on the contrary, it happens in a very smooth way.

Roth's protagonists' desire to transcend the limits imposed by formal religion is also evinced in their relationship with their own religious/ethnic group and with people from other races or creeds. In the conflict between assimilationist and traditional American Jews, they tend to reject alignment with either side. This is the attitude of Neil Klugman who comes from a ghetto community and penetrates into the world of the assimilationist Patimkins. Although there are moments in which he feels he could easily become one of them, Neil winds up going back to his job at Newark Publick Library in the Rosh Hashanah. This last scene of "Goodbye, Columbus" adds up to his decision of joining neither his ghetto-minded relatives nor the assimilationist Patimkins, but rather to follow a way of his own. In his involvement in the dispute between the assimilationist Jews of Woodenton and the orthodox community of Tzuref, Eli Peck is unable to take a strong position with either of them. His attempt to conciliate the interests of the two sides earns him the third nervous breakdown in his life. Luckier than his counterparts, Nathan Zuckerman is presented a third road to follow. Facing one extreme in his father and Judge Wapter (the ghetto-minded Jews) and the other in Felix Abravanel (the all-American Jewish writer), Nathan ends up as a disciple of E.I. Lonoff who cannot be framed as belonging to any group or faction.

This seems to be the attitude that Roth undoubtedly favors for "real Jews" - to use Aunt Gladys' words. They should try to be moderate and avoid either a blind attachment to their religious background or despise it entirely.

Moderation and good sense are also the attitudes these protagonists adopt in relation to the non-Jewish. This is a natural consequence of their refusal to view the world only in terms of the Jew-gentile opposition. In this way, Portnoy understandably revolts against his mother's disgust with their black charwoman just because of her skin color. Together with this, as we have seen, the way the gentiles are viewed is a theme which permeates all of the other stories, stirring up the mind of people as different as the schoolboy Ozzie Freedman, the Sergeant Nathan Marx, and the young intellectual Nathan Zuckerman.

For most of these characters, this attitude means an aggravating element to the already difficult relationship with their parents. The reasons for their unsurmountable difference of opinion in what concerns this point have been pointed out along this chapter. First of all, these protagonists are aware of the socio-cultural reality surrounding them which is quite different from any lived by their forebears. Thus, keeping an animosity against the non-Jewish on account of persecution and discrimination they have not experienced would not be justifiable. As a consequence and/or cause of that, their parents' values are reviewed and sometimes disposed of bringing about the conflict between them.

Roth's protagonists' attitudes, behavior, and viewpoints,

which have been pointed out along this analysis of **Goodbye, Columbus**, **Portnoy's Complaint**, and **The Ghost Writer** show, then, that he has really succeeded in, through an actual experience of his, exploring the human possibilities in what concerns religious experience. In so doing, he has managed to universalize the theme of religion through his own experience as a 20th century American Jew.

NOTES

[1] Roth, Philip. **Reading Myself and Others**. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 151

[2] Solotaroff, Theodore. "Philip Roth and the Jewish Moralists." **Chicago Review**, 13 (Winter 1969), p. 88

[3] Roth, **Reading Myself and Others**. p. 165

[4] Baumgarten, Murray and Gottfried, Barbara. **Understanding Philip Roth**. (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), p. 12

[5] Roth, Philip. **The Facts - A Novelist's Autobiography**. (USA: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 7

[6] Roth, **Reading Myself and Others**. p. 157

[7] In defining "the modern man," I am under debt to Dr. João Batista Libânio who held the lecture "Modernidade e Teologia da Libertação" at UFSC on October 07, 1991

[8] Solotaroff, Theodore. "Philip Roth: A Personal View." In **Critical Essays on Philip Roth**, ed. by Sanford Pinsker (Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. 147

[9] Baumgarten and Gottfried, p. 8

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